Adultery in Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*: a model of loyalty and fidelity

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Abstract

Ce mémoire a pour but d'analyser la notion d'adultère dans *Le Morte Darthur* de Thomas Malory (1469), une compilation de romans arthuriens français et anglais qui retrace l'histoire du roi Arthur de sa naissance jusqu'à sa mort, de la création de la Table Ronde jusqu'à sa chute qui mène à la destruction de son royaume. Pour écrire son œuvre, Thomas Malory s'est inspiré de textes français et anglais narrant les diverses légendes arthuriennes. Dans les textes français, l'adultère de la reine Guenièvre avec le meilleur chevalier du royaume Lancelot est décrit comme la cause principale de la destruction du royaume mais je vais montrer dans ce mémoire que dans *Le Morte Darthur*, l'adultère est présenté de façon beaucoup plus complexe.

En comparant les deux principales relations adultérines dans *Le Morte Darthur* (celle entre Lancelot et Guenièvre qui se déroule dans le royaume de Camelot et celle entre Tristan et la reine Iseult qui se déroule dans le royaume de Cornouailles), j'affirme dans la première partie de ce mémoire que Thomas Malory met en valeur deux principales qualités qui existent entre les amants : leur loyauté et leur fidélité. La force des liens qui unissent les deux couples d'amants, une force si grande qu'elle y devient destructrice et a un impact sur la situation politique des deux royaumes. L'adultère apparaît comme le moyen choisi par Thomas Malory pour agrandir le thème politique dans son œuvre, qui apparaît comme beaucoup plus destructeur que les relations qu'entretiennent les amants à cause des rivalités ainsi qu'au manque de loyauté et de confiance entre les chevaliers d'un même royaume.

En effet, dans la seconde partie de mon mémoire, je suggère que l'adultère en lui-même n'est pas un problème, mais que le problème est dû aux chevaliers qui n'hésitent pas à utiliser les amants comme bouc émissaires afin de commettre leur revange, d'exercer leur haine et leur jalousie et de gagner du pouvoir. Un intérêt spécial sera porté aux sources françaises du *Morte Darthur* pour montrer que la trame politique devient la trame principale dans l'œuvre de

Malory, et ce au détriment de la trace romantique. Ce changement peut s'expliquer en regardant le contexte historique dans lequel *Le Morte Darthur* a été écrit, en pleine guerre civile entre nobles anglais qui changeaient d'allégeance et n'étaient pas unis, contrairement aux textes français qui furent écrits en période de paix afin de divertir l'aristocratie.

L'argument principal à retenir de ce mémoire est que Malory renverse les qualités négatives associées à l'adultère et en fait en symbole de loyauté, de fidélité, mais un symbole détruit par le désir incessant de pouvoir et le manque d'unité politique entre les hommes du royaume de Camelot et du royaume de Cornouailles. Cette situation fictive est semblable aux évènements réels qui se déroulent dans la deuxième moitié du quinzième siècle en Angleterre, ce qui renforce donc l'idée d'un lien indissociable entre littérature et histoire.

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Adultery in *Le Morte Darthur*: Introduction

In the Middle Ages, a universal point of view over the topic of sexuality did not exist. Scholars often contradict each other on that topic because there was one repressive and negative attitude given by the Church – which was deeply involved in the condemnation of sexual transgressions in Europe – and other attitudes which were more lay and secular. However, what most scholars agree on is that committing adultery was considered sinful because it disrupted the order of society and its traditional laws of marriage and fidelity. In his article on medieval concepts of adultery, Vern Bullough points out that "adultery was looked upon with considerable hostility even by the lay person" (Bullough, 12).

A common feature of medieval romance literature – mostly Arthurian legends dealing with love, magic, adventures and knights going on a quest – is their tendency to be filled with sexual transgressions such as rape, incest or adultery. Among these sexual transgressions, I believe that adultery is the most interesting one to study because it is the most present and the most complex. This why in this thesis I will study the representation of adultery in one of the most famous surviving medieval pieces of Arthurian literature entitled *Le Morte Darthur*, which was written by Sir Thomas Malory in 1469 and published by William Caxton in 1485. More specifically, I will be exploring the two main adulterous relationship of the *Morte Darthur*[1] which are the relationship between Launcelot and queen Guinevere of Camelot and the relationship between Tristram and queen Isolde of Cornwall.[2] *Le Morte Darthur* is a reworking of existing tales and legends that covers the founding of king Arthur's kingdom in Camelot, the creation of the Round Table, the numerous adventures of various knights such as

[1] In this thesis, I will mostly refer to *Le Morte Darthur* by its shortened name *Morte Darthur*.

[2] As most as the Arthurian characters, these four characters are known under various spellings (Launcelot or Lancelot; Guinevere, Gwenyver, Guenivere or Guenièvre; Tristram or Tristan; Isolde, Isode, Iseut or Yselt). Among these various existing spellings, I have chosen to use Launcelot, Guinevere, Tristram and Isolde in this thesis because most of the scholars use these spelling, but the other spellings – when used by the rest of the scholars – still refer to the same characters.

Launcelot and Tristram, the quest for the Holy Grail, the death of Arthur and ultimately the fall of his kingdom. According to Beverly Kennedy,

> The theme of adultery is central to the story of King Arthur. The king himself was begotten by means of adultery; as a young man he committed adultery […]; and his reign came to an untimely end because he could not resolve the political crisis engendered by Mordred's openly accusing his queen of adultery. (Kennedy, 63)

Kennedy presents adultery as central for king Arthur and in this thesis, I will examine how Malory dealt with the theme of adultery and how adultery has repercussions not only on Arthur but also on the whole kingdom. My argument is that the *Morte Darthur* presents adultery as a weakness in the power dynamics of the kingdom and that adultery illustrates the knights' eagerness to fulfil their own political ambitions when they use the adulterous relationships to their advantage and to gain power.

Part of my analysis will look at how adultery can coexist with fidelity if we look at the loyalty between the adulterous lovers. I will discuss how adultery is not perceived badly as long as loyalty prevails over its sexual aspect, and I will show how and why adultery is downplayed in the *Morte Darthur*, which I argue is done to give more room to the political intrigue and to the masculine rivalries in the kingdoms of Camelot and of Cornwall as an effort to subtly reflect on the ongoing civil war for the English throne taking place between the nobles. But before diving into politics and history, I first want to talk more about adultery and especially when the married person is the woman (which is the case for both Launcelot and Guinevere and Tristram and Isolde in the *Morte Darthur*). One of the most famous scholars who has studied medieval sexuality is the American historian Ruth Mazo Karras who argues in her book *Sexuality in Medieval Europe* that sexual transgressions – such as adultery – committed by men were regarded as far less serious than if committed by women: "The church did preach equality in this area, that it was just as bad for a married man to violate his marriage vow as for a woman

to do so. In practice, however, adultery was treated more seriously in cases where the woman was married" (Karras, 88). This double standard is justified by the fact that a married woman committing adultery was of great concern as it could lead to the conception of an illegitimate child which would disrupt the potential line of succession between fathers and sons.

Furthermore, in her article entitled "The Regulation of sexuality in the Late Middle-Ages", Karras provides data and tables revealing that many men were accused in adultery cases. Yet, many of those men were not married but were the adulterous women's lovers. She explains that naming the women's lovers meant providing evidence of the adultery, exposing the men and destroying their reputations. Karras' data appears useful as we will see that the *Morte Darthur* corroborates her explanation when several knights indeed provide evidence of Guinevere and Isolde's adulteries in the hope of exposing the lovers and destroy Launcelot and Tristram's reputations. Karras also reports that unfaithful wives and their male lovers were more punished than unfaithful husbands whereas it was not uncommon for the king to have many mistresses and not be pursued for it. This gendered and unbalanced structure of blame can be found in the Arthurian adultery. For example, when a knight named Gaheris surprises his mother Morgause in bed with another knight named Lamorak, he kills her. King Arthur banishes Gaheris, who eventually comes back and is accepted in court again by Arthur. After that, Gaheris organizes Lamorak's murder with his three brothers and the four men kill their mother's male lover, his punishment for having slept with a married woman. Gaheris' punishment is light in comparison of his crimes: he only loses his honor because of his criminal behavior. In contrast, queen Guinevere is sentenced to death without even a trial when she is accused of treason and adultery with Launcelot. Launcelot – because of his status of best knight of the realm – is spared, but king Arthur soon declares war against him. As a consequence, Launcelot loses his close bond with the king and is now seen as the kingdom's enemy.

Adultery also implies that love triangles exist in the Arthurian legends, triangles in which Guinevere and Isolde are caught between two men: their husbands and their male lovers. In her book *The Romance of Adultery*, Peggy McCracken asserts that adulterous women are driven by love and that they consider their lovers as their true love. McCracken claims that the women' desire is perceived as passionate and with long-lasting effects while the men' adulterous relationships are shallower and more episodic. This difference of behavior would explain why adultery was considered as more dangerous when it involved a married woman: because of the tendency for married women to have their adulterous relationships last longer than married men would, adultery represents then a larger threat for the married couple. In my analysis of the *Morte Darthur*, I will show that the relationship between the queens and their lovers is indeed long-lasting and that they consider their lovers and not their husbands as their true loves. However, I see Malory putting a twist to it because he makes the longevity and strength of the adulterous love as signs of loyalty, and turns something negative into something positive, or at least with the positive effects superseding the negative ones.

In the *Morte Darthur*, the two most famous adulterous women who have a long-lasting love for their lovers are Guinevere and Isolde, respectively the queen of Camelot and the queen of Cornwall. Adultery then comes off as a massive threat because the queens love Launcelot and Tristram more than their husbands and because their adulterous relationships are at a high risk to be exposed to the public eye (which does happen in the *Morte Darthur*). In addition, since Guinevere and Isolde are queens, the kings become the cuckolded husbands and adultery thus has an impact on both the marital relationship and the entire kingdom. Adultery creates a romantic and a political problem because the knight takes the place the king should be occupying in the queen's heart (and bed), and she is therefore more incline to side with the knight and go against the king. The problem adultery causes concerning the balance of power and will be discussed in more depth in this thesis.

Now that I have given a short introduction as to how adultery was viewed in medieval society, I turn to the presentation of Malory's sources to see how the Arthurian literary tradition dealt with adultery. When writing the *Morte Darthur*, Malory used both French and English sources. In this period, England was trilingual and authors such as Thomas Malory working in Middle English used Old French all the time, so to adequately understand English medieval literature one must also look at the French sources: using French language texts is a common methodology for English literature scholars working on romance because the French and English traditions were closely intertwined. Indeed, W. Rothwell indicates that "English society in the Middle Ages functioned through the medium of a trilingual culture" with English, French and Latin interacting in the "literate classes in the society" (Rothwell, 45). His studies show that there were "contacts between Anglo-French [an Old French dialect used in England] and Middle English at a profound level" (Rothwell, 66). So, while this thesis is about Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, I bring in French sources in order to have a better understanding of Malory's composition, which remains to this day one of the most influential works in Arthurian literature.

For this thesis, with the exception of one English source, I have chosen to focus more closely on Malory's French sources because they were very influential for *Le Morte Darthur* but also because they are more numerous and more interesting than the English sources in regards to the topic of adultery. In what concerns the story between Launcelot and Guinevere, the main French source Malory took inspiration from is called the prose *Lancelot* – also known as the *Lancelot-Grail* or *Vulgate Cycle*. Written in Old French in the early 13th century, the prose *Lancelot* is a literary cycle made of five prose volumes about Arthurian legends. Out of those five volumes, two volumes – the Vulgate *Laucelot Propre* and the Vulgate *Mort le Roi Artu* – both contain heavy traces of the relationship between Launcelot and Guinevere as they narrate the early life of Launcelot up until his death. The other three volumes which are the Vulgate *Estoire del Saint Graal*, the Vulgate *Estoire de Merlin* and the Vulgate *Queste del Saint*

Graal are not centered around Launcelot and Guinevere and will therefore not be mentioned[3] nor further discussed in this thesis. For the story of Tristram and Isolde, the only French source Malory took major inspiration from is called the *Tristram en prose* – or prose *Tristan* – a 13th century anonymous prose romance. Malory's whole "Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones" section is based on that French book.

Moreover, prior to the prose *Lancelot,* the *Chevalier de la Charrette* was written during the 12th century in Old French by Chrétien de Troyes. It is in this text that Launcelot makes his first appearance, and it thus can be said that Chrétien de Troyes – one of the most famous French medieval authors and poets – gave birth to the character of Launcelot of the Lake (or *Lancelot du Lac* in original French). One century later, the story of the *Chevalier de la Charrette* was incorporated into the prose *Lancelot,* in the *Lancelot Propre* volume. When it was incorporated in the prose *Lancelot,* the *Chevalier de la Charrette* – which was originally written in verse – became the prose *Conte de la Charrette,* and was later used in the 15th century by Malory when he wrote *Le Morte Darthur,* although reduced to the much shorter "Knight of the Cart" episode (*Works*, 648-663).[4]

[3] At the exception of one quote in the first chapter for the *Queste del Saint Graal.*

[4] Before going further, some clarification on the editions focusing on those French sources is needed. Previous scholars have used these following works: *Lancelot, roman en prose du XIIIè siècle,* edited by Alexandre Micha (Geneva: Droz, 1978-1983) and about the Vulgate *Lancelot Propre*, *La Queste del Saint Graal: roman du XIIIè siècle,* edited by Albert Pauphilet (Paris: Champion, 1923) about the Vulgate *Queste del Saint Graal*, and *La Mort le roi Artu: roman du XIIIè siècle*, edited by Jean Frappier (Geneva: Droz, 1964) about the Vulgate *Mort le roi Artu*. In the modern editions edited by Alexandre Micha between 1978 and 1983, the *Lancelot Propre*, (one of the five volumes of the prose *Lancelot*) is itself divided into nine smaller volumes. In this thesis, the volume cited will be written in roman numbers (such as *Lancelot V* for the fifth volume). Also, scholars refer to *La Morte le roi Artu* as the *Mort Artu*, which I will do as well from now on. I am using those works even if the editions might differ. I am using the edition from 1949 concerning the *Queste*, and the 1936 edition for the *Mort Artu*. For the *Chevalier de la Charrette*, the edition I use is from 1977, and edited by Prosper Tarbé (Geneva: Slatkine). From now on, the *Chevalier de la Charrette* will be referred as *Chevalier*. Finally, for the *Conte de la Charrette* part of the prose *Lancelot*, the episode takes place in Micha's third volume (Geneva: Droz, 1979). Concerning the story of Tristram and Isolde, there are several versions of the story with more than eighty manuscripts. Previous scholars have used

Malory also used two major English sources. The first one is an anonymous 14th-century English poem called the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur* about the love story between Launcelot and Guinevere, and the condensed version of the French *Mort Artu*. The origin of the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur* has been explained by scholars as the desire to have the story between Launcelot and Guinevere present in the English literature but without some narrative elements that were judged unnecessary and too complex. As a result, the English author only kept the most important events and reduced the story to about a fifth of its original length, but I will show later that differences existed between the French and the English texts, differences which obliged Malory to make choices between his sources. Malory's second major English source is called the *Alliterative Morte Arthur* and is a poem based on *Historia Regum Britanniae* (*The History of the Kings of Britain*) written in 1138 by Geoffrey of Monmouth. In the *Alliterative Morte Arthur* there is no mention of Launcelot's adulterous love for Guinevere, and most of the content is found in the section of Malory's book titled "The Noble Tale betwixt King Arthur and Lucius the Emperor of Rome" which is not of great interest for this thesis. I will therefore not refer to the *Alliterative Morte Arthur*.

In addition to his main sources, Malory also used other sources at a lesser degree. Those minor sources are harder to recognize because they are less distinguishable in Malory's work. While connections with his major sources can easily be drawn, Malory might have used some sources for only one specific moment in his whole work. In his book devoted to Malory's sources, Ralph Norris reports that evidence is hard to gather to distinguish a potential source

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the editions in Old French by Renée L. Curtis entitled *Le Roman de Tristan en prose*, consisting of three volumes published in 1963, 1976, and 1985. I am using those editions as well in this thesis, which I will refer from now on as *Tristan I*, *Tristan II* and *Tristan III* (Leiden: E.J. Brill). However, Curtis did not completely edit the whole prose *Tristan* and her editions do not include the ending of the story between Tristram and Isolde. Therefore, concerning the scene of the lovers' death, I am using an article written by Joseph Bédier and published in the quarterly collection *Romania* in 1886 because is it the only version of the scene I have been able to find in Old French.

from an addition from Malory: "When a possible minor source is identified that could explain Malory's changes, there will still be a chance, greater or smaller, that the differences reflect Malory's independent creativity" (Norris, 9). In this thesis, I thus look only at Malory's major or known sources in order to avoid all possible misidentifications.[5]

Malory's French sources were influential and popular among the aristocratic circles only, mainly because they were the only part of the population who were able to read at a time when the majority of people were illiterate. They were considered as leisure literature, and belonged to the genre of romance, a genre defined by Norris J. Lacy as a "sophisticated and complex form that dramatized quests and tests and explored the connections – and often the conflicts – of love and adventure" (Lacy, 167) that can "run to many hundreds, even several thousands, of pages" (Lacy, 168). Lacy also writes that "the overwhelming majority of French prose romances are Arthurian" (Lacy, 168), including Malory's sources. In "The Shame of romance in medieval France", Matilda Bruckner gives us the main themes of this genre: "problems of identity linking the individual and society; the role of love within competing value systems; power relationships and relations of affection […] as well as the interplay of history and romance" (Bruckner, 28). Both critics have thus confirmed that the main components of the romance genre are love, quest, and adventure. Another element that quickly became essential for the genre of romance is called "courtly love" (*amour courtois or fin'amor* in French), a term that was first coined in 1883 by the French scholar Gaston Paris. According to

[5] The manuscripts for the four main French sources and main English source I will use in this thesis are: the Winchester Manuscript (now the British Library Additional MS 59678) used by Eugène Vinaver and Helen Cooper for *Le Morte Darthur*, MS Carpentras 404 for the prose *Tristan* (MS Carpentras 404 is not complete but it was chosen by Curtis as the one with the best quality and the most complete in its first 130 folios which survived), Cambridge Corpus Christi College 45 and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson D.899 used by Alexandre Micha for the prose *Lancelot*, Paris Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS 3347 chosen by Jean Frappier among 45 manuscripts for the *Mort Artu*, and British Museum Harley 2252 for the English *Stanzaic Morte Arthur*.

Paris, a love is only courtly when the adulterous love affair is between a knight and a married noblewoman. The courtly love must be *illégitime* (illegitimate) and *furtif* (brief) (Paris, 518). The courtly lover is defined as inferior and willing to do everything for the lady he loves; to earn her affection, he must show her his strength and his devotion by achieving several various tasks: "il accomplit toutes les prouesses possibles" (he accomplishes all the possible feats) (Paris, 518). Scholars however disagree on a definition of courtly love, with Paris, Moorman and Lacy seeing courtly love as having both positive and negative connotations while other scholars such as Alexander J. Denomy view courtly love differently and disagreed with Paris' definition, especially concerning the sexual and sinful aspects of it. I judge necessary for the analysis of the differences between *Le Morte Darthur* and its French sources to present both visions because I will show that the French texts fit Paris' definition while *Le Morte Darthur* is closer to Denomy's vision of courtly love.

Paris saw courtly love as both an illegitimate love (because it involves a married lady) and a positive love (because despite being sinful, the adulterous courtly love inscribes itself within the chivalric code of servitude and devotion that was very important during the Middle Ages). Charles Moorman also defines courtly love as "the source of the best features of the chivalric code" but also "immoral and adulterous" and "vigorously condemned as such by the Church" (Moorman, 165). Lacy describes it as "a literary convention in which the chivalric efforts of a knight are both motivated and validated by his love for his lady" and also as "ultimately destructive" (Lacy, 171) because passionate and forbidden. Other characteristics of this courtly love are that it is sudden and passionate, does not stay unnoticed and is suspected and discovered by diverse people. In the Arthurian stories, the destructive characteristic of courtly love that Lacy mentions corresponds to the downfall of the Round Table because of the discovery of Launcelot and Guinevere's adulterous relationship and the subsequent desire to get rid of the lovers because they are threats to the kingdom.

In “Courtly Love and Courtliness”, Denomy gives another definition of courtly love. Denomy sees courtly love as a “type of sensual love” which has for purpose the “lover’s progress and growth in natural goodness, merit, and worth” – or “the ennobling of the lover” (Denomy, 44). For him the courtly lovers are not sinful because “what is done […] under Love’s compulsion cannot be sinful or immoral; rather it is virtuous and righteous as a necessary source of natural goodness and worth” (Denomy, 44). He also states that “in its purest form, it eschews physical possession because, once consummated, desire decreases and tends to vanish” (Denomy, 44). Denomy disagrees with the other critics on courtly love’s illegitimacy when he explains that “such love was spiritual in that it sought a union of hearts and minds rather than of bodies; it was a virtuous love in so far as it was the source of all natural virtue and worth” (Denomy, 44). In this thesis, I will analyze Malory’s vision of courtly love and conclude that it appears closer to Denomy’s because of the *Morte Darthur*’s emphasis – for Launcelot and Guinevere especially – on the lovers’ loyalty and on their virtue, and its reduction of their physical relationship and their sinful behavior.

When defining courtly love, Gaston Paris did not base his definition on the *Morte Darthur* but on the *Chevalier de la Charrette*, where Launcelot makes his first appearance as a major character in the Arthurian literature. It is in the *Chevalier de la Charrette* that Launcelot must show his strength and his devotion to Guinevere by achieving several various tasks, part of his role as a courtly lover to manage to seduce his lady. In *Allegory of Love* by C.S. Lewis, the relationship between the courtly lover and his lady is further explained:

> The sentiment of course, is love, but love of a highly specialized sort, whose characteristics may be enumerated as Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love. The lover is always abject. Obedience to his lady’s lightest wish, however whimsical, and silent acquiescence to her rebukes, however unjust, are the only virtues he dares to claim. There is a service of love closely modelled on the service which a

> feudal vassal owes to his lord. The lover is the lady's 'man'. He addresses her as *midons*, which etymologically represents not 'my lady' but 'my lord'. (Lewis, 2)

This is the type of relationship which is found in the *Chevalier*, where adultery is romanticized and the courtly lover humiliated. Launcelot appears blind, naïve, and inferior to the lady as she has control over his behavior and actions. Launcelot is so blinded by his love for Guinevere that it prevails over reason. At some point, different rumors saying that Launcelot and Guinevere have died spreads in the kingdom, which makes the other ready to commit suicide:

> Lors n'i demore ne délaie:
>
> Einz mest parmi le laz sa leste,
>
> Tant qu'entor le col li areste. (*Chevalier*, 116)
>
> (Then he does not wait,
>
> He puts his head in the slipknot
>
> And grips it around his neck)[6]

However, none of them die and they are both relieved when they learn that the rumors were false. What this passage proves is that Launcelot is ready to die for Guinevere and thus behaves as the perfect courtly lover. Chrétien de Troyes' *Chevalier* became well known and was used as an inspiration for many books and was incorporated in the prose *Lancelot*, where the love story between Launcelot and Guinevere gained even more fame among aristocrats. When he wrote the *Morte Darthur*, Malory used the story and converted it into a shorter episode which can be found at the end of "The Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere". This makes the *Chevalier* a perfect example to be analyzed in order to illustrate how adulterous courtly love

[6] All the translations of the Old French texts all mine.

was portrayed in the French texts, how Malory took inspiration from Chrétien de Troyes and how he narrates the story in the *Morte Darthur*.

In his article entitled "Malory and Chrétien de Troyes", P.J.C. Field recognizes Chrétien's influence on Malory, notably when Malory took inspiration from *Yvain* – another poem written by Chrétien – for the third tale of the *Morte Darthur* about Launcelot: "The number and closeness of these similarities suggests […] that Malory wrote with a copy of Yvain in front of him." (Field, 26). Chrétien's influence on Malory is corroborated by other critics including Kenneth Hodges who states that Chrétien is "Malory's ultimate source" for his romance content (Hodges, 74) and by Ralph Norris who suggests that "although Malory would not have known all of the above-named works [including Chrétien's], he did know many of the most important well" (Norris, 3). Nevertheless, Field explains that it is difficult to find a strong correlation between Malory and the French poet:

> Malory borrowed nothing of what twentieth-century readers have most valued in Chrétien's romance. To modern eyes, what Malory took from Chrétien […] is little more than raw material for romance. He borrowed nothing of Chrétien's distinctive use of the magical or his psychological insight […] and nothing of what some modem critics have thought to be the views of life that Chrétien's stories embody. (Field, 26)

While is it unsure whether Malory was aware of the existence of the *Chevalier de la Charrette* or whether he only knew about the prose *Launcelot* version, there is little doubt that Malory did know about Chrétien de Troyes and his view on courtly love. I will therefore closely study in this thesis the "Knight of the Cart" story in comparison to the episode of the prose *Lancelot* and the *Chevalier de la Charrette* to see how courtly love and adultery are presented and how their representation has evolved as we will see that Malory reduces the adulterous content, removes Launcelot's humiliation and makes his love for Guinevere reciprocal.

In this thesis, I will investigate Malory's changes in the narration from his French sources and I will show how he took another angle by reconfiguring the episodes as he wanted to. While Malory took great inspiration from his French sources and used them as a background for his plot, I will argue that Malory portrays adultery differently than his French sources. In the French romances, courtly love and adultery are central to the story. Jean Frappier writes in his study of the French *Mort Artu* that "La cause profonde de la destruction de la Table Ronde, c'est l'adultère de Lancelot et de la reine : le fol amour que les amants avaient réussi à tenir secret pendant si longtemps atteindra vers le tiers du roman à une telle violence qu'il sera révélé à tous et au roi lui-même" (The root cause of the destruction of the Round Table is the adultery between Launcelot and the queen : the passionate love that the lovers had managed to keep secret for so long reaches such strength towards the third of the novel that it is revealed to all and to the king himself) (Frappier, 362). Here, the blame is explicitly put on Launcelot and Guinevere and on their passionate and adulterous love: in the French texts, the lovers are presented as passionate and the adultery is recognized as illegitimate and sinful. But in the *Morte Darthur*, I propose adultery is used in a more complex way: to illustrate personal rivalries leading to disorder, self-destruction and political disintegration. This is why the romantic and sexual aspects of adultery are underplayed in the *Morte Darthur*. However, the *Morte Darthur*'s French sources were so popular that Malory could not completely avoid treating adultery if he wanted to be truthful to the story of the Round Table. That is why I insist that, as a compromise, Malory departed from those sources on numerous occasions and changed the stories in order to have the *Morte Darthur* fit his own vision of the Arthurian romance. For instance, Malory chose not to express as many private feelings of the characters and did not present Launcelot as a courtly lover. As we will see, Malory managed to do so by emphasizing Launcelot and Guinevere's shared loyalty while restraining their physical passion. I will also analyze how Malory's attitude over the theme of adultery has repercussions on the whole Arthurian world,

and conclude on how the *Morte Darthur* can also be considered a political statement of its times.

Le Morte Darthur was written during the fifteenth century when chivalry orders were numerous in England but also when the country was facing a period of great political instability. One century earlier, inspired by the tales of king Arthur, King Edward III (who reigned from 1327 to 1377) decided to implement chivalric values in his court. He also created the Order of the Garter in 1348 where twenty-four knights joined the king who acted at the Sovereign of the Order, similar to the twenty-four knights of Arthur's court. One hundred years after the Order's creation, England had lost the Hundred Years War to France in 1453, a loss which was followed by social and financial troubles. King Henry VI (who reigned from 1422 to 1460, and again from 1470 to 1471) was not as powerful as his ancestor Edward III, and Henry VI hated the powerful nobles, nobles who started to question the king's ability to control the country. The political tensions between king and nobles eventually led to a fight for the control of England – nowadays known as "War of the Roses" – between Lancastrians, who still supported Henry VI, and Yorkists, who supported Richard, 3rd duke of York. The duke of York claimed the throne in 1460, and he could do so because of a direct male line of descent from his great-grandfather king Edward III, who was the founder of the House of York. This period of civil unrest which lasted from 1455 to 1487 was a disaster for the nobility, which saw half of its lords die during the war. Similarities exist between the events narrated *Morte Darthur* and the historical events taking place in England, as for example the knights (or nobles) fighting among each other, betraying each other, and lacking loyalty. As such, both real and fictitious kingdoms suffer a severe political loss, and I believe that the real-life events have an impact on the presentation and the treatment of adultery in the *Morte Darthur*: adultery is not an issue as central as in its French sources because it allows the readers to focus their attention on the masculine relationships, on the lack of loyalty between men who do not hesitate to destroy other

members of their own kingdom to gain individual power. Also, I suggest that by emphasizing the loyalty between the adulterous lovers who remain united until their deaths, it strengthens the contrast with the homosocial conflicts and denounces the necessity for more unity instead of division between men.

To look at how the adulterous relationships are represented in the *Morte Darthur*, I will firstly compare the relationship between Launcelot and Guinevere and the relationship between Tristram and Isolde, and I will discuss their similarities and their differences. I will also study the *Morte Darthur*'s French sources to see how the representation of adultery from French literature to English literature has changed and evolved. Then I will analyze how adultery inscribes itself in a larger political plot, and how adultery is used by multiple men in the kingdoms of Camelot and Cornwall to achieve their own personal agendas. This will provide a better understanding as to why Malory has altered so much his sources when it comes to the theme of adultery: to shift the focus from romance to politics, and from heterosexual relationships to homosocial ones. All of these elements combined will show that the *Morte Darthur* appears as a critique of the political chaos happening in Malory's own kingdom which illustrates his wish for unity and loyalty, the two main qualities of the Launcelot-Guinevere and Tristram-Isolde adulterous relationships.

SECTION 1

A genuine and natural bond versus a magical and tragic bond: loyalties in the adulterous relationship disrupting the power balance of the kingdoms

The first section of my thesis deals with the two main adulterous relationships of the *Morte Darthur*: the relationship between Launcelot and Guinevere and the relationship between Tristram and Isolde. In this section I present Thomas Malory's different narrative strategies concerning the presence or the absence of physical adultery – compared to his French sources the *Chevalier de la Charrette*, the prose *Lancelot*, the *Mort Artu* and the prose *Tristan*. While traces of physical adultery from the sources are preserved for Tristram and Isolde to show the strength of the love potion which binds the two lovers, they are removed for Launcelot and Guinevere. With the removal of the sexual content, the *Morte Darthur* puts the emphasis on Launcelot and Guinevere's loyalty. The result of Malory's different strategies gives two distinct forms of loyalty: the bond between Launcelot and Guinevere appears natural whereas the bond between Tristram and Isolde is magical. The relationships' endings also differ: Launcelot and Guinevere become members of the religious order and they die in a state of holiness whereas Tristram is slayed by his uncle Mark and Isolde dies immediately after because the power of the love potion is so strong that it binds them in life and in death.

Even though their loyalties and endings are quite opposite, I see a common feature emerging in both adulterous relationships, something that will be addressed more in the second section: the adulterous relationships disrupt the power balance of the kingdom because the kings of Camelot and Cornwall are the cuckolded husbands, and the queens' allegiance to their lovers is stronger than to their husbands. In both kingdoms, the king is in a position of inferiority and weakness compared to his best knight. In order to gain or maintain power, the knights close to

the king or the king himself want to reveal and destroy the adulterous relationship, a revelation leading in the collapse of the kingdoms.

Chapter 1

Launcelot and Guinevere: a shift from a physical and sinful love to a platonic and noble one, result of a mutual fidelity

This first chapter is devoted to Launcelot and Guinevere only, where I focus on the two main characteristics Malory chose to identify for their relationship: loyalty and fidelity. These characteristics differ from the earlier French texts relating the story of Launcelot and Guinevere which served as sources for Malory. In the prose *Lancelot* and in the *Chevalier de la Charrette*, adultery is explicitly acknowledged by their authors and the physical and lustful aspects of adultery are praised. On the contrary, Malory appears more careful in his treatment of these aspects. In this chapter, I examine how and why Malory differs from his French sources concerning the adulterous relationship between Launcelot and Guinevere, which I believe is done to shift the focus of their love from a physical and sinful aspect to a noble one (not concentrated on desire but on mutual faithfulness and trust, qualities that Malory admired). In order to compare Malory to these French sources, examples on how the French texts position the relationship between Launcelot and Guinevere are provided. A greater attention is brought on the "Knight of the Cart" episode taking place after the Grail quest because it is where most of Malory's alterations occur. I have chosen to look at the prose *Lancelot*, Malory's direct source, on Chrétien's de Troyes *Chevalier de la Charrette*, narrating the origin of the Knight of the Cart episode used by Malory, and also on the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur* to show that Malory follows his English source when it comes to minimizing the sexual content. I also demonstrate how Malory's definition of virtuous love fits Launcelot and Guinevere when they repent themselves and put God above everyone else, including each other. The study of the diverse scenes taken from the *Morte Darthur* and its sources results in a more concrete knowledge of how Malory treats their relationship, of his vision of adultery, and of how he makes an example of loyalty out of the lovers: adultery does not matter for Malory, who downplays physical

contacts between Launcelot and Guinevere and accentuates the strength of their platonic love because of his dislike of sexualized courtly love.

In his article entitled "Epistemology of the Bedchamber: Textuality, Knowledge, and the Representation of Adultery in Malory and the Prose *Lancelot*", Robert S. Sturges asserts that Malory's French source the prose *Lancelot* is "straightforward about the nature of this [Lancelot and Guinevere's] relationship" (Sturges, 48), that it does not "undercut its scenes of adultery" (Sturges, 59), and that "references to direct, physical adultery are not uncommon" (Sturges, 57). Adultery being explicitly mentioned in the French texts is acknowledged by other scholars than Sturges such as Charles Moorman who writes in his article "Courtly Love in Malory" that Malory's French sources "present the adulterous love of Launcelot and Guinevere as a proven fact" (Moorman, 168) and that there exist many instances of physical adultery between the two lovers throughout the French texts. In "Adultery in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*", Beverly Kennedy states that "the French author says that Lancelot's love for the queen quickly became just as passionate as it had even been […], the French author is explicit about the adultery […], he is equally explicit about the adultery being nothing new, but rather something they had done before" (Kennedy, 76). These critics agree that the adulterous relationship between Launcelot and Guinevere does not happen only once but multiple times. Building from what they have said, on the consensus that sexual intercourses are frequent in the French sources, I have chosen four examples from these sources which illustrate the sexual explicitness of Launcelot and Guinevere's adultery. The examples also allow for a better insight of the nature of Launcelot and Guinevere's relationship Thomas Malory had in front of him when he wrote the *Morte Darthur*, and decided to alter it.

First, the lovers are found in bed together on several occasions and the French author evokes Launcelot and Guinevere's private nights together:

> Si se despoille et se couche avec celui por qui ele avoit tant mal sosfert, se li fait tel feste come a celui qu'ele n'aimme mie moins de soi. Ainsi jurent toute la nuit ansemble et ot li uns de l'autre toute la joie qu'il avoient si longuement desirree. (*Lancelot IV*, 379)
>
> (Then she undressed and lay down with the man for whom she had suffered so much, and she gave much pleasure to the man that she loved not less than herself. And so they stayed all night together and took pleasure in each other which they had desired for a long time)

In this passage, the words *feste* (pleasure) and *desirree* (desired) are used to describe their private relationship. What is more, Guinevere *despoille et se couche* (undressed and lay down), meaning that she now finds herself naked, or almost naked. However, other even more explicit examples exist, for instance when the lovers are still in bed together the morning after. The French author puts an end to any possible doubt the reader might have had concerning the nature of their relationship when their nudity is obviously evoked:

> il furent trové nu a nu par Agravain qui espiez lis avoit (*Lancelot IV*, 399)
>
> (they were found naked side by side by Agravain who had spied on them)

They are together, *nu a nu* (naked side by side) in the same bed, and they take pleasure in each other. This proves that the French author is not afraid to develop even more on passionate love, on mutual desire, and to give details concerning the physical relationship of the lovers with the use of explicit words.

In Malory's French sources, Launcelot and Guinevere engage in sexual intercourse. Explicit words are used for these encounters but they are also used when the lovers express their feelings as for example when in the *Queste*, Launcelot confesses his love to a hermit:

> Sire, fet Lancelot, in est einsi que je sui morz de péchié d'une moie dame que je ai

> amee toute ma vie, et ce est la reine Guenievre, la fame le roi Artus. (*Queste*, 66)
>
> (Sir, says Launcelot, it is true that I am in a state of deadly sin because of a woman I have loved all my life, and this is the queen Guinevere, the wife of king Arthur.)

It is Launcelot himself who says that he is *morz de péchié* (in a state of deadly sin) which means that he is aware of the immoral nature of his relationship with Guinevere and of the sinful feelings he has for her. If one person is self-aware that he or she is sinning, the expected outcome would be for that person to be tormented by it or feel guilty about it. However, while Guinevere is full of remorse that their forbidden love prevents Launcelot from achieving the Grail Quest, Launcelot does not feel any guilt. The courtly lover replies that for him, his love for Guinevere – and not achieving the Grail Quest – is a virtue:

> Mais ce que je baoie a vos et a vostre grant biauté mist mon cuer en l'orgueil ou j'estoie si que je poïsse trouver aventure que je ne message a chief ; car je savoie bien, se je ne pooie les aventures passer par prouesce, que a vos ne vandroie je ja, et il m'i couvenoit avenir ou morir. Dont je vos dit vraiement que ce fu la chose qui plus acroissoit mes vertuz. (*Lancelot V*, 3)
>
> (But the fact that I aspired to you and your great beauty made my heart so proud that I could not find an adventure I could not achieve, because I knew well that if I could not complete my adventures without prowess, I could not win you. I had to try or die. So I tell you that this was the thing that made my virtues grow.)

According to Launcelot, loving Guinevere is what made him a better man and a better knight, and his adulterous romance with Guinevere allowed him to improve himself. He has completed his adventures in order to prove his love for Guinevere, which echoes the most important attributes of a courtly love: to conquer the lady's heart through various tasks and adventures and to always honor her. Launcelot's reply to Guinevere illustrates the ennobling spiritual

power the lady has on the knight mentioned by Gaston Paris when he gave his definition of courtly love. The knight is chivalrous in the French texts, but what seems to matter most is for the lady to fall in love with her knight. Knowledge of how courtly love is portrayed in the French sources has been gained through the four examples provided. These examples confirm that the French authors explore the romantic and sexual sides of Launcelot and Guinevere's adulterous story: the two lovers are naked in bed. Launcelot, as the perfect courtly lover, does not regret his romantic sinful feelings towards Guinevere.

The vision of courtly love in the French sources praising romance and sexuality is transformed by Malory to become noble and virtuous. In his article "The Place of the 'Quest of the Holy Grail' in the 'Morte Darthur'", P.E. Tucker comments that Malory, in relation to his sources, "dislike[d] the idea that love-service is an integral part of knighthood" (Tucker, 392). Tucker also states that Malory's "view of knighthood says nothing of love, whereas in Malory's sources it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that love is the very inspiration of chivalry" (Tucker 391-392). Tucker's argument is that Malory did not want to focus on the physical aspect of Launcelot and Guinevere's relationship in the *Morte Darthur* because the adultery part of courtly love was not the most important for him. While I agree with Tucker on the point that Malory got rid of the lecherous and shameful courtly love, I disagree when he says that Malory "view of knighthood says nothing of love". I believe that Malory's view of knighthood says something of love through his addition of personal comments on several passages in the *Morte Darthur,* comments indicating that loyalty and fidelity are admired qualities by Malory which he transmitted to Launcelot and Guinevere. I agree more with Robert H. Wilson who writes that "though Malory did not wish to stress Lancelot's character as a lover, he knew of it as something which deserved more attention than it was given in the sources of the particular stories he was retelling" (Wilson, 35) and that "Malory knew what was told in the Cycle, but chose to present the relationship as platonic and Lancelot as chivalrously reticent" (Wilson, 41). By looking at

the "Knight of the Cart" story where Malory includes his own personal comments, I will now show how he gave attention to love, only to get rid of the courtly adulterous love and replacing it with faithful and noble love, or "platonic" to use Wilson's terminology.

As I have stated in the introduction, the "Knight of the Cart" story present in the *Morte Darthur* finds its origin in the 12th-century Old French poem *Chevalier de la Charrette* by Chrétien de Troyes. In the poem, Launcelot goes to Guinevere's rescue after she has been abducted by a knight called Meliagaunt. He manages to get to her after jumping in a cart leading to Meliagaunt's castle where Guinevere is held captive. This story is reduced and incorporated in the prose *Lancelot* and is again reduced[7] even more by Malory. Despite being shortened, I believe that the Knight of Cart episode is a crucial moment in Malory's work as it confirms the progressive disappearance of the courtly love content from the original poem to the *Morte Darthur* and it presents Malory's views on lecherous and adulterous love. At the beginning of the "Knight of the Cart" episode, Malory comments on love and reveals that he is against physical love because of its instability and its tendency to be short-lived. No special mention of adultery is made. With the absence of any special mention, the reader does not worry about the adulterous nature of the love between Launcelot and Guinevere, and he does not condemn it either. Adultery is not what is important: more than being between a husband and wife, stability in love is what is key. In that sense, an adulterous but long-lasting love such as the one between Launcelot and Guinevere is preferred to a shallow one. In love, faithfulness and stability between the lovers are the praised qualities:

> But nowadays men can nat love sevennyght but they muste have all their desyres […] Thys ys no stabylyté. But the odle love was nat so. For men and women code love togydirs seven yerys, and no lycoures lustis was betwyxte them, and that was love

[7] From page 648 to page 663 in the edition I am using (Malory, Thomas. *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory.* Edited by Eugène Vinaver. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947)

> trouthe and faythefulnes. And so lyke was used love in kynge Arthurs dayes. (*Works*, 649)
>
> (But nowadays men cannot love seven nights but they must have all their desires. […] this is no stability. But the old love was not so; for men and women could love together seven years, and no lecherous lusts were betwixt them, and then was love, truth and faithfulness. And so in like wise was used such love in King Arthur's days. (*Winchester*, 444)[8]

The words "trouthe" and "faythefulness" are used by Malory, the two most important characteristics of love according to him. "Trouthe" has patriotic, romantic and religious connotations and means "allegiance to one's country, kin, friends; devotion, constancy in love, genuine love" and also "a promise, a pledge of loyalty, an oath" (Middle English Compendium). What Malory rewards here is the constancy in love because Launcelot and Guinevere's love lasts and does not disappear over time. On the contrary, "lycoures lystis" (lecherous lusts) is what Malory criticizes and what is explicit in his French sources. Contrary to the French texts, no explicit mention of sexual adultery is made and it is not said whether Guinevere and Launcelot undress themselves, are naked in bed, and have any sexual contact. Through this comment, Malory states his point of view on the adulterous relationship between Launcelot and Guinevere: them loving each other does not matter, what matters is that there should be a consistent loyalty between the lovers and that sexual intercourses should be avoided.

Malory's vision of love appears very close to Alexander J. Denomy's who described courtly love as a "type of sensual love" (as opposed to sexual) which has as its purpose the "lover's progress and growth in natural goodness, merit, and worth" – or "the ennobling of the lover" because "what is done […] under Love's compulsion cannot be sinful or immoral; rather

[8] For the translations of the original Middle English text in Modern English, I use *The Winchester Manuscript* (ed. Helen Cooper. Oxford, 1998) which will be referred as *Winchester* in this thesis.

it is virtuous and righteous as a necessary source of natural goodness and worth" which "in its purest form […] eschews physical possession" (Denomy, 44). For his definition of courtly love, Denomy studied the expression "amors corteza" which is found in twelfth-century Provençal literature and was used by troubadours such as Arnaut de Mareuil and Folquet de Marseille. Provençal – or Occitan – literature is the literature of southern France which was very influential throughout Europe in the Middle Ages, including England. Denomy reports that amors corteza is a spiritual quality, a non-sexual virtuous love which consists "in observing moderation between the extremes of excess and deficiency, in cultivating humility and avoiding pride and […] what is odious and vile" (Denomy, 62). The love between Launcelot and Guinevere in the *Morte Darthur* seems to concur with what Denomy has found in the Provençal texts: Malory's comment implies that there is no physical possession between Launcelot and Guinevere, and their "trouthe" and "faythefulness" in each other is what make their love noble. In order to follow the idea of a non-sexual and more spiritual love, I believe that Malory chose to alter his sources when they wrote about courtly and sexual love.

For example, Malory changed the story of the cart in order to remove its courtly content. In the initial Old French poem, Chrétien explains that riding a cart is the greatest shame a knight can experience because a cart is a very dishonorable form of transport for a knight and is generally used for criminals. Launcelot is afraid of being shamed but he still accepts to ride the cart because it means he will be reunited with Guinevere:

> Mal le fist ; mar il douta honte […]
> Amors le velt ; et il i saut ;
> Que de la honte ne li chaut,
> Dès que amors comande et velt. (*Chevalier*, 14-15)
>
> (Too bad he was afraid of shame […]
> He wants love; and he jumps in it;

Because shame does not matter,

As soon as love commands and wants.)

Even if Launcelot is humiliated, he does not feel shameful as his love and devotion for Guinevere are stronger. It is to please Guinevere that Launcelot goes thought several quests in the *Chevalier*. He sometimes does unreasoned things such as jumping in the cart and sacrificing his honor, which results is his fellow knights mocking him. Launcelot is presented as a courtly lover in the *Chevalier*, and is Gaston Paris' very example to define the term "courtly love".

In the part of the prose *Lancelot* corresponding to the *Chevalier*'s story, the symbol of the cart that is significant in Chrétien de Troyes' story is loses its negative connotations:

> "Dont monte, fet li nains, en ceste charete, et je te menrai en tel lieu ou tu en savras verraies enseignes. – Creantes me le tu ? fet Lancelos. – Oïl, fet cil." Et il saut maintenant en la charete. (*Lancelot II*, 12)
>
> ("So go inside this cart, says the dwarf, and I will lead you to the place where you will have real information. – Do you promise me? Asks Launcelot. – Yes, replies the dwarf." And he [Launcelot] jumps now in the cart.)

Here, the only concern Launcelot has is the dwarf's honesty and not the shame of jumping into the cart. It is particularly clear as Launcelot jumps right after the dwarf promises him to lead him towards Guinevere. In the prose *Lancelot*, Gawain, Guinevere, and even Arthur jump into the cart:

> Et la roine saut sus et il descent et li rois i monte lez la roine, […] ne des lors en avant, tant com il rois vesqui, ne fu nus hom damnés mis en charete. (*Lancelot II*, 94)

> (And the queen jumps in it, and he [Gawain] goes down, and the king goes in next to the queen […] from that moment on, as long as the king lived, no condemned men were put in a cart.)

In addition to letting the king go inside the cart, the French author mentions that no condemned men were put in a cart. This passage from the prose *Lancelot* destroys Chrétien's shameful connotations of the cart and acts as a first step towards the removal of courtly love. However, even if the narrative has evolved from the *Chevalier de la Charrette*, courtly love and adultery are still very much present in the prose *Lancelot* as Launcelot jumps in the cart to reunite with Guinevere. Courtly love remains present in all parts the French prose cycle as romance and adultery are fully part of the Arthurian legends through the story of Launcelot of Guinevere.

In Malory's *Morte Darthur*, the cart completely loses its original purpose and, contrary to what is found in the French texts, Launcelot does not jump in the cart to be reunited with Guinevere. In Malory's version, Launcelot does jump because his armour is too heavy:

> Than sir Lancelot walked on a whyle, and was sore acombird of hys armoure, hys shylde, and hys speare. […] Than by fortune cam [by hym] a charyote that cam thydir to feche wood. (*Works*, 653-654)
>
> (Then Sir Launcelot walked on a while, and was sore encumbered of his armour, his shield, and his spear […] Then by fortune came a chariot that came thither to fetch wood.) (*Winchester*, 449)

To fit the larger story of Launcelot rescuing Guinevere, it happens that the carter's lord is Sir Meliagaunt, and that by going in the cart Launcelot is able to see Guinevere.[9] The outcome is the same as in Malory's sources, but that is not important: what matters is the minimization of

[9] The dwarf present in both the *Chevalier* and the *Conte* is replaced by two carters, one of whom is killed by Launcelot, who is then led to Meliagaunt's castle by the second carter.

the courtly content and the emphasis on Launcelot as a knight instead of Launcelot as a desperate lover. In the prose *Lancelot*, the cart ceased to have a negative meaning and in the *Morte Darthur* it even appears to have a positive meaning: appearance is linked to "fortune" because it is thanks to this cart that Launcelot does not have to carry his armour. Because the *Chevalier de la Charrette* displays Launcelot as a courtly lover ready to do anything for the lady he loves, and not as a noble lover, Malory quickly puts an end the Knight of the Cart episode:

> And, as the Freynshe booke sayth, he ded […] more than forty batayles. And bycause I have loste the very mater of Shevalere de Charyot I departe frome the tale of sir Launcelot. (*Works*, 669)
>
> (And as the French book saith, he did […] more than forty battles. And because I have lost the very matter of le *Chevalier du Chariot*, I depart from the tale of Sir Lancelot.) (*Winchester*, 467)

Malory favours Launcelot's knightly abilities by telling the readers that Launcelot has participated in more than "forty batayles" (forty battles) and he is not reduced to his romantic quest. Malory might have indeed lost the matter of the story, or omitted the bulk of it, but my take on his comment is that he might have decided to reduce it because he found its content unnecessary for his portrayal of Launcelot and Guivenere's love: Launcelot's portrayal as a humiliated lover whose love for Guinevere is not reciprocal goes against Launcelot and Guinevere being a model of mutual loyalty and fidelity.

I have mentioned in this chapter that the Knight of Cart episode is a crucial moment in Malory's work as it confirms the progressive disappearance of the courtly love content of the original poem from the *Morte Darthur* and it presents Malory's negative views of sexual love. The Knight of the Cart is also important in the *Morte Darthur* because it presents Launcelot

and Guinevere in bed together. However, I assert that Malory lets them go to bed together because he has planned to alter the story in another way, and we will see that the *Morte Darthur* does not elaborate on what is happening between Launcelot and Guinevere and instead brings the focus on Meliagaunt, who does not have a noble behavior and accuses the queen on adultery without absolute proof. No sexual act is explicitly stated when Launcelot and Guinevere are in bed together because adultery is not what the reader should be concerned about, and because it would go against his definition of love without "lycoures lystis" (lecherous lusts) (*Works*, 649):

> So, to passe uppon thys tale, sir Launcelot wente to bedde with the quene and toke no force of hys hurte honed, but toke hys pleaunce and hys lykynge untyll hit was the dawnyng of the day; for wyte you well he slept hat, but wacched. (*Works*, 657)
>
> (So, to pass upon this tale, Sir Launcelot went to bed with the Queen and took no force of his hurt hand, but took his pleasance and his liking until it was the dawning of the day; for wit you well, he slept not, but watched.) (*Winchester*, 453)

At first, it might seem paradoxical that Malory removes traces of physical adultery and yet still lets Launcelot and Guinevere go in bed together, but Malory only lets Launcelot go in Guinevere's bed because Launcelot has hurt himself while on his way to see Guinevere, and the blood Launcelot leaves on the sheet is later used by Meliagaunt to accuse Guinevere of adultery.

Malory's textual alteration happens after Guinevere and Launcelot have spent the night together and Launcelot has left the room. Meliagaunt enters the queen's chamber, opens the curtains and sees the blood in her bed (the blood belongs to Launcelot who hurt himself while going into Guinevere's room, but Meliagaunt does not know that). Meliagaunt accuses Guinevere of adultery with one of the knights and affirms he will reveal the truth to Arthur. Then, Malory adds Launcelot's accusation of Meliagaunt where Launcelot wonders why

Meliagaunt was eager to enter her room and open her curtains and whether he has spied on the queen:

> My lorde kynge Arthur hymselff wolde nat have displayed hir curtaynes, and she being within her bed, onles that hit had pleased hym to have layne hym downe by her. And therefore, sir Mellyagaunce, ye have done unworshypfully and shamefully to youreselff. (*Works*, 658)
>
> (My lord King Arthur himself would not have displayed her curtains, she being within her bed, unless that it had pleased him to have lain him down by her. And therefore, Sir Meliagaunt, ye have done unworshipfully and shamefully of yourself.) (*Winchester*, 455)

This addition has previously been studied by Angela Gibson who writes in "Malory's Reformulation of Shame" that the prose *Lancelot* "makes nothing of Melyagaunt's intrusion: he enters the chamber, which is 'his custom', and the blood is plainly observable without further investigation" (Gibson, 71) and that "Lancelot does not make a countercharge" (Gibson, 71). Launcelot's countercharge serves her argument that "exposing otherwise hidden activities is tantamount to, or worse than, actually performing them" (Gibson, 71). Building on her argument, I see Launcelot's accusation of shameful peeping as a way to deflect the target to Meliagaunt who has exposed the queen's potential sexual activity. Gibson's argument that revealing a private act is worse than the act itself serves as a possible explanation as to why Malory has made Launcelot go in Guinevere's bed: because it is useful for Meliagaunt's accusation and Launcelot's countercharge. Adultery is suggested only to be overshadowed by Launcelot's accusation. I bring that issue further and suggest that Launcelot's countercharge minimizes the adulterous content and sheds light on the knightly fights and the attempts by some knights to bring shame on other knights. I believe that Malory does not remove that scene because it is necessary for the bigger scheme of knights tearing each other down, here

Meliagaunt and Launcelot. The issue of knightly fights taking over adultery will be further addressed in the second section, and for now I continue with more textual evidence proving that Malory removed the courtly content that he judged unnecessary.

A key scene of evidence against Launcelot and Guinevere present in the French prose *Lancelot* is absent from the *Morte Darthur*. In the French text, Launcelot is said to have painted past moments of his life on a wall, moments which include his first meeting with queen Guinevere. Launcelot then kisses the portrait he has made of her:

> Au matin, quant Lanceloz fu levez et il […] vint en la chambre painte, si vit l'ymage de sa dame, si l'ancline et la salue et vait prés et l'ambrace et la baise en la bouche, si se delite assez plus qu'il ne feist en nule autre fame fors en sa dame. (*Lancelot V*, 54)
>
> (In the morning, when Launcelot was awake, he […] went to the painted room, and saw his woman's face, then bowed and greeted her, went closer, embraced her and kissed her on the mouth, and more took pleasure in his woman more than any other woman.)

Even if Guinevere is not physically present in the room, the fact that Launcelot calls her *sa dame* (his woman) and gives her a kiss are clear evidences of their adulterous affair, and *ancline* (bowed) mark of his devotion for her. I suggest that Malory removed this scene because it portrays Launcelot passionately in love with Guinevere and Malory's purpose is to stripe their love of its courtly and passionate nature to make it more platonic and virtuous.

In fact, even if Malory takes inspiration in the stories from his French sources for Launcelot and Guinevere's story, mainly the prose *Lancelot* and the *Mort Artu*, he actually is much closer in the diminutive depiction of physical content to his English source, the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur*. In this 14th-century Middle English poem itself based on the French *Mort Artu*, the sexual aspect of Launcelot and Guinevere is drastically reduced and is only evoked once:

When he come to the lady sheen

He kist and clipped that sweete wight;

[…]

So mikel love was them between

That they not departe might;

To bed he goeth with the queen,

And there he thought to dwell all night. (*Stanzaic*, 1800-1807)

(When he came to the beautiful lady

He kissed and embraced that sweet creature

[…]

So much love was between them

That it might not go away

He goes to bed with the queen

Where he thought to remain all night.)

On one side, Malory might have taken inspiration of his English source in diminishing the courtly love and lecherous content of Launcelot and Guinevere's tale, but on the other side he still followed much of the enormous[10] French content which gave him many stories and allowed him to create a more cohesive tale.

Lancelot and Guinevere's love is stable because it is not motivated by lust and, accordingly, Malory removes every traces of physical adultery when he feels the need. Earlier in the chapter, we have seen that Malory also has added some comments to fit his vision of nobility such as the comment at the beginning of the Knight of the Cart story where faithfulness and stability between the lovers are the qualities that are praised. After the Knight of the Cart

[10] The English poem *Stanzaic* is about 4000 lines while the French prose *Lancelot* is about six times the length of the *Morte Darthur*.

story, Launcelot goes again into the queen's room. At this moment, Malory states that he will not reveal what happens in the French books which I believe is a subterfuge to hide the French explicitness of Launcelot and Guinevere's sexual encounters. For this specific example, in order to directly illustrate what Malory is discarding, I first bring the textual evidence from the French source to then use the corresponding episode in the *Morte Darthur*:

> Quant Lancelos fu la dedenz, si ferma l'uis aprés lui, si comme aventure estoit qu'il n'i devoit pas estre ocis. Si se deschauça et despoilla et se coucha avec la reine. (*Mort Artu*, 92)
>
> (When Launcelot went inside the room, he closed the door after himself, as what was to happen should not be seen. Then he took his footwear off, undressed himself and went to bed with the queen.)

With the words *despoilla* (undressed) and *coucha* (lay in bed) used one after the other, this example is another confirmation that there exist many pieces of evidence on Launcelot and Guinevere being in bed together in the prose *Lancelot*. In Malory's French sources, adultery is proven for the reader and nothing is hidden. However, in the *Morte Darthur*, Malory decides to not reveal whether Guinevere and Launcelot are in bed together:

> For, as the Freynshhe booke seyth, the quene and sir Launcelot were togydirs. And whether they were abed other at other maner of disportis, me lyste nat thereof make no mencion, for love that tyme was nat as love ys nowadayes. (*Works*, 676)
>
> (For as the French book saith, the Queen and Sir Launcelot were together. And whether they were abed or at other manner of disports, me list not thereof make no mention, for love that time was not as love is nowadays.) (*Winchester*, 471)

Here, Malory does not say what the French book says, but he instead says "me lyste nat thereof make no mencion" (I do not desire to make any mention). Malory appears both vague and direct

in his narrative. He is vague because he restrains himself from giving details: he will not reveal what he does not want to reveal. But he is also very direct with the reader with that confession which comes along a justification. Malory's justification is a comment he made earlier in the *Morte Darthur* where he says that "nowadays men can nat love sevennyght but they muste have all their desyres […] Thys ys no stabylyté. But the olde love was nat so" (nowadays men cannot love seven night but hey must have all their desires. […] this is no stability. But the old love was not so) (*Works*, 649). Malory believes that love in his days has gotten worse and that its purpose is to fulfill the desire of lust. Through Launcelot and Guinevere, Malory proves to his readers how the 'old love' was not linked to lust but was virtuous.

Ultimately, it seems like Malory's purpose is for the lovers to fit his vision of virtuous love, a love based on loyalty, fidelity and stability between the lovers but also to God:

> Let every man of worshyp florysh hys herte in thys worlde: firste unto God, and nexte unto the joy of them that he promised hys feythe unto: for there was never worshypfull man nor worshypfull woman but they loved one bettir than anothir; and worshyp in armys may never be foyled. But firste reserve the honoure to God, and secundely thy quarrel muste com of thy lady. And such love I calle vertuouse love. (*Works*, 649)
>
> (Let every man of worship [reputation] flourish his heart in this world, first unto God, and next unto the joy of them that he promised his faith unto. For there was never worshipful man nor worshipful woman, but they loved one better than another; and worship in arms may never be foiled. But first reserve the honour to God, and secondly thy quarrel must come of thy lady. And such love I call virtuous love.) (*Winchester*, 444)

Malory's definition of virtuous love is written in order to praise loyalty between the lovers, a loyalty proven when Launcelot defends the queen at multiple occasions. Launcelot is noble in

his love; he worships his lady and has a genuine devotion for her. Malory gives voice to Launcelot to remind the reader of how good and devout a knight he has been, as when he says to Guinevere he has "never fayled you [Guinevere] in right nor in wronge sytthyn the firste day kynge Arthur made me [Launcelot] knyght" (never failed you in right nor in wrong since the first day King Arthur made me knight) (*Works*, 676).

In what concerns God however, Malory had to make some changes from his sources in order to make the lovers fit his definition of virtuous love where one must "firste reserve the honoure to God, and secundely thy quarrel muste com of thy lady" (*Works*, 649). While he participates in the Grail quest with other knights, Launcelot confesses to a hermit that he has thought of Guinevere and not of God:

> And all my grete dedis of armys that I have done for the moste party was for the quenys sake, and for hir sake wolde I do batayle were hit ryght other wronge. And never dud I batayle all only [for] Goddis sake, but for the wynne worship and to cause me the bettir to be beloved, and litill or nought I thanked never God of hit. (*Works,* 539)
>
> And all my great deeds of arms that I have done, for the most part was for the queen's sake, and for her sake would I do battle were it right or wrong; and never did I battle all only for God's sake, but for to win worship and to cause me the better to be beloved, and little or nought I thanked never God of it. (*Winchester*, 332)

Here, Launcelot clearly states that he has thought of his lady Guinevere first, and not of God, and that he has fought for her, a characteristic of the courtly lover. According to Terence McCarthy, Launcelot's confession is "in total contradiction to Malory's definition of the ideal love" (McCarthy, 66). He suggests that the contradiction was "forced upon Malory by his source material and that the passage from the Grail book [Launcelot's confession] should not been given too much importance" because Malory "cannot be held responsible […] for

everything an Old French book makes his hero say" (McCarthy, 66). McCarthy also suggests that "Lancelot's confession might have slipped his [Malory's] mind entirely" (McCarthy, 66). I agree that Launcelot's confession appears contradictory at first glance, but I believe that Malory has kept some of the more explicit courtly love content to show Launcelot's growth. Moments after his confession, Launcelot realizes he should repent and follow God:

> Frome hensforewarde I caste me, by the grace of God, never to be so wycked as I have bene but as to sew knyghthode and to do fetys of armys. (*Works*, 540)
>
> From henceforward I cast me, by the grace of God, never to be so wicked as I have been, but as to pursue knighthood and to do feats of arms. (*Winchester*, 334)

Launcelot is aware of his sinfulness and that he should put God above Guinevere. Between Launcelot's confession in Book XIII and Malory's comment on virtuous love in Book XIX there is more than one hundred pages, and the reader notices Launcelot's desire to improve.

After his confession, Launcelot keeps referring to God throughout his life. A key moment in Launcelot's life regarding religion occurs when he is surprised by Agravaine and Mordred in the queen's room. Launcelot appears very pious and innocent:

> "As for worldis shame, now Jesu deffende me! And as for my distresse, hit ys welcome, whatsomever hit be that God sendys me" (*Works*, 660)
>
> (As for world's shame, now Jesu defend me; and as for my distress, it is welcome whatsoever it be that God sends me) (*Winchester*, 457)

When Launcelot says "Whatsomever hit be that God sendys me", it illustrates his humility. He is ready to accept whatever God sends his way, whether it is forgiveness or death. Launcelot admits his sin of having spent the night in the same room than the queen and he starts repenting for it. His desire to be defended by God is repeated a few moments later when he is put in jail:

> "God deffende me frome sush a shame! But, Jesu Cryste, be Thou my shylde and myne armoure!" (*Works*, 677)
>
> ("God defend me from such a shame! But Jesu Christ, be Thou my shield and mine armour!") (*Winchester*, 472)

Here, Launcelot asks God to be his shield and his armour. By asking God to be his armour, Launcelot makes God replace a knight's most important attribute and what protects him from being hurt by an opponent. His religious behavior is supported by him imploring God several times: "Jesu Mercy" (*Works*, 676-678). Launcelot trusts God, and is ready to be guided by Him. His process to become a full pious and humble knight is almost complete. However, I claim that the process cannot be fully completed without the contribution of Guinevere who releases him from his duty as a knight to protect her.

Guinevere has been following the same path of repentance as Launcelot to follow Malory's definition of virtuous lover. She repents herself when Arthur dies and the Round Table is destroyed, partially because of her close relationship with Launcelot. She takes responsibility for her actions when she enters religious life, becomes a nun, and then dies a holy woman. In the French sources, Guinevere does not become nun by choice but only becomes a nun because she fears that Mordred, who has declared war on Arthur, will kill her. Malory instead decided to follow the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur* where Guinevere chooses to become a nun:

> When Queen Gaynor, the kinges wife,
> Wiste that all was gone to wrake,
> Away she went, with ladies five,
> At Aumsbury, a nun her for to make. (*Stanzaic*, 3566-3569)
>
> (When Queen Guinevere, the king's wife,
> Knew that all was gone to ruin

She went away with five ladies,

To Aumsbury to become a nun.)

Guinevere going to the convent by choice and not out of fear demonstrates that she recognizes her role in the fall of the Round Table and repents herself by free will, out of sincerity. Guinevere "takes it upon herself to contribute in some way to the social order that she has helped destroy" (Blanton, 62) because she is a "changed woman, one who has embraced the life of penance by her own choice" (Blanton, 66). She has remained faithful to Launcelot all her life, her love for him has never ceased, and she finally puts God above him at the end of her life when she renounces him.

Indeed, when Launcelot learns she has become a nun, he goes to meet her in the cloister of the Amysbery abbey where she makes him a confession:

> "Sire Launcelot, wyte thou well I am sette in suche a plight to gete my soule hele. And yeti truste, thorow Goddis grace […] I commaunde the, on Goddis behalf, that thou forsake my company.") (*Works*, 720)
>
> (Sir Lancelot, wit thou well I am set in such a plight to get my soul's health; and yet I trust through God's grace […] I command thee, on God's behalf, that thou forsake my company.) (*Winchester*, 520)

In this scene, Guinevere has the power without making the mistakes she previously made, to be seen with Launcelot in her chamber. She is the abbess of the abbey, and she has power to rule it without a husband or a knight. She has chosen the cloister – a more public place – to make her confession, and not a private place such as her cell or bedroom: this change of location purifies their love because they no longer talk in a private room but in a religious space. Her husband is dead but Guinevere shows determination and refuses Launcelot as well, releasing

him from his duty as a knight and commanding him to "forsake [her] company", which inspires Lancelot to later enter the religious life as well and put God above his lady.

After Guinevere's confession, Launcelot refuses to have affection for any other woman than Guinevere and is totally devoted to chastity. He becomes a monk and a priest and:

> Took th' abyte of preesthode of the Bysshop […] endure suche penaunce in prayers and fastynges […] in remyssyon of his sins. (*Works,* 722)
>
> (took the habit of priesthood of the bishop […] endure such penance in prayers and fastings […] in remission of his sins.) (*Winchester,* 522)

The last sentence sums up Launcelot's religious devotion and his repentance. Launcelot, just like Guinevere, now completely fits Malory's personal comment on virtuous love cited above: "But firste reserve the honoure to God, and secundely thy quarrel muste com of thy lady" (*Works,* 649). Launcelot has defended the queen; he has fought for her, has been her knight, and he has saved her life multiple times. He might have been too close to the queen by going in her bed but he immediately repents from it and reserves his honor to God. At the time of his death, Launcelot has become the best knight and is admired by everyone, but not because of his relationship with Guinevere. When a eulogy is made to his name after his death, this is what is said about him:

> "Thou were hede of al Crysten knyghtes! […] the curters knight that ever bare shelde! […] the truest frende to thy lovar that ever bestrade hors, […] the trewest lover, of a synful man, that ever loved woman, […] the kindest man that ever strake with swerde. […] the godelyest persone that ever came emonge prees of knyghtes, […] the mekest man and the jentyllest that ever ete in hall emonge ladyes, […] the sternest knight to thy mortal foo that ever put sper in the reeste." (*Works,* 725)

> ("Thou were head of all Christian knights! […] the courteous knight that ever bore shield; […] the truest friend to thy lover that ever bestrode horse; […] the truest lover of a sinful man that ever loved woman; […] the kindest man that ever struck with sword; […] the goodliest person that ever came among press of knights. […] the meekest man and the gentlest that ever ate in hall among ladies, […] the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear in the rest.) (*Winchester,* 526)

Launcelot's relationship with Guinevere is recognized, but he still remains the "trewest" lover, meaning that his true love for Guinevere has been stable during his whole life. This is correlated by Kennedy who writes that Launcelot "can be forgiven, but only because Malory has completely transformed the context in which the offence takes place and radically altered Lancelot's prior motivation and subsequent response" (Kennedy, 436). Malory giving Launcelot redeeming qualities makes Launcelot reach heaven and die a holy man. Thus, both lovers have learned to love God above the other, and they die at their most perfect, pious and innocent point in life. Malory, through his narrative alterations of adultery, has managed to shift Launcelot and Guinevere from courtly, sexualized lovers to noble, faithful and virtuous ones.

In this chapter I have established that loyalty and fidelity are the main characteristics describing the love between Launcelot and Guinevere in the *Morte Darthur* by Thomas Malory. Malory differs from his French sources on the physical aspect of their relationship, and appears closer to his English in his reduction of the courtly love content and of the explicit physical contact between the lovers. I believe that Malory's alterations are done to shift the focus of their love from a physical and sinful love to a noble one not concentrated on desire but on mutual faithfulness and trust. Malory is concerned about love, but not on whether love is adulterous or not: what matters in love is its stability, hence why he puts emphasis on Launcelot and Guinevere's genuine loyalty for each other until their deaths when everything else in the kingdom falls apart. Ultimately, their mutual noble and faithful love is rewarded when they are

able to repent themselves. We will now see that such virtuous love and redemption do not happen for Tristram and Isolde because the power of their love and loyalty is more magical than natural.

Chapter 2

Tristram and Isolde: a long-lasting and tragic-ending magical love, result of a powerful love potion

In the previous chapter I wrote that Malory de-emphasized physical love because of its instability and its tendency to be short-lived. His main concern about love was not about whether it was adulterous or not but about its stable and loyal nature, which explains why he removed the courtly love content and put emphasis on Launcelot and Guinevere's chaste loyalty. This chapter, which investigates the relationship between Tristram and Isolde, shows that Malory's treatment of love is different because their relationship is centered around its magic nature and not its genuine connection. Malory does not criticize adultery but criticizes sexual love because love does not last when it includes sex. But for Tristram and Isolde, the love potion they drink changes everything: because their loyalty is due to magic and they are bound to love each other for the rest of their lives, it does not matter if Tristram and Isolde are engaging in sexual intercourses. The very reason why Malory is against physical love – because it makes the relationship unstable and short-lived – is overturned by the fact that Tristram and Isolde's love cannot be stopped. With Tristram and Isolde, sexual intercourses and long-lasting love are compatible, but it is possible because the lovers are helped by magic.

With various examples provided throughout the chapter, I show that Malory remained closer to his source the French prose *Tristan* than to the prose *Lancelot*. The *Morte Darthur* and the prose *Tristan* both depict the physical adultery committed by Tristram and Isolde, the power of the love potion, and the tragic ending of their magical love. As a consequence of their magical link, Tristram and Isolde are constantly reunited until they ultimately die together. At some point, Tristram marries another woman named Isolde les Blanches Mains but he leaves her to go back to the original Isolde. By contrasting Lady Segwarides – a woman Tristram falls in

love with before drinking the potion – and Isolde les Blanches Mains – whom Tristram falls in love with after drinking the potion – I will show how Tristram is prevented from engaging in a sexual relationship with another woman than La Belle Isolde[11] because of the potion's power and not entirely because of his own will.

First, I would like to acknowledge that work has already been done on the comparison between Launcelot and Tristram and on the comparison between the Launcelot-Guinevere and Tristram-Isolde relationships. In "Courtly love in Malory", Charles Moorman writes that "Malory's only reason for including the Tristan material at all was to provide a 'parallel motif' to the Lancelot-Guinevere relationship" (Moorman, 172). Donald G. Schueler, in "The Tristram Section of Malory's 'Morte Darthur'" adds that "such a parallel exists is hardly a novel suggestion. It would be difficult for any reader not to notice the insistence with which Malory draws connections between Tristram and Lancelot" (Schueler, 63). As he explains, both are great knights and both are engaging in an illicit relationship with their lords' wives (Schueler, 58). Schueler's main argument is that "Malory has exploited these similarities only in order to underline the fact that the situations of the two knights are not really similar at all" (Schueler, 58) because Launcelot is a member of the Round Table while Tristram only enters the Round Table late in the story. D. Thomas Hanks also evokes the similarities and differences between Launcelot and Tristram in his article "Malory's 'Book of Sir Tristram': focusing 'Le Morte Darthur'" and confirms that "again and again the two are compared; the overall judgement is that Tristram is a great knight, but that Lancelot is the greatest" (Hanks, 15-16). My work adds on the previous findings on these similarities and differences between Launcelot-Guinevere and Tristram-Isolde, and focuses especially on the differences between the two couples when it comes to mutual faithfulness, loyalty, and to their fates; themes that are not covered in the

[11] The first Isolde Tristram meets is also named La Belle Isolde (the French for "the beautiful Isolde") in the *Morte Darthur* and I will use this name to differentiate her from the second Isolde Tristram meets who is named Isolde les Blanches Mains (the French for "Isolde the white hands").

current critical work. Before analyzing Tristram and Isolde's relationship in the *Morte Darthur*, I will now summarize the beginning of the "Book of Sir Tristram De Lyones" in order to present the two lovers.

Following its French source the prose *Tristan*, *Le Morte Darthur* presents Tristram as a Cornish knight who lives in the kingdom of Cornwall governed by his uncle king Mark. Tristram is the most skilled knight of Cornwall, and when the kingdom is attacked by an Irish duke named Marhalt, brother to the queen of Ireland, Tristram defends his kingdom by engaging in a combat against Marhalt. Tristram overcomes Marhalt and kills him, but he finds himself wounded by Marhalt's poisoned weapon. Before dying, Marhalt reveals that Tristram can only be cured by someone from the Irish court[12] and Tristram decides to go there with his squire Gouvernail. In Ireland, Tristram changes his name into Tramtrist, a name he can use without being recognized as the famous Cornish knight who killed the queen's brother. Tristram uses his skills as a harpist to get closer to the queen's daughter named Isolde, who is fascinated by Tristram's talent. Recognizing princess Isolde's great beauty, Tristram is infatuated:

> Sir Tramtryste kyste grete love to La Beale Isode, for she was at that tyme the fairest lady and maydyn of the worlde. And there Tramtryste lerned hir to harpe and she began to have a grete fantasy unto hym. (*Works*, 238-239)
>
> (Sir Tramtrist cast great love to La Belle Isode, for she was at that time the fairest lady and maiden of the world. And there Tramtrist taught her to harp, and she began to have a great fancy unto him.) (*Winchester*, 179)

[12] Versions vary as to how Tristram learns about the cure: in the prose *Tristan*, it is Marhalt who in his last moments reveals to Tristram that his wound can only be healed by a member of the Irish royal family. In the *Morte Darthur*, Tristram is warned by a lady.

Tristram is healed by princess Isolde and is able to travel back to Cornwall. But before leaving Ireland, Tristram and Isolde make a promise to each other:

> "I promyse you faythfully, I shall be all the dayes of my lyff your knyght" […] "I promise you there agaynste I shall nat be maryed this seven yerys but by your assente, and whom that ye woll I shall be maryed to hym and he woll have me, if ye woll consente thereto." And than sir Trystrames gaff hir a rynge and she gaff hym another. (*Works*, 243-244)
>
> "I promise you faithfully, I shall be all the days of my life your knight" […] "I promise you thereagainst, I shall not be married this seven years but by your assent; and whom that ye will, I shall be married to him and he will have me, if ye will consent thereto." And then Sir Tristram gave her a ring, and she gave him another. (*Winchester*, 185)

This exchange of rings acts as a binding commitment, a natural commitment that will later be surpassed by a magical one when Tristram and Isolde drink the love potion. Tristram is now Isolde's knight and has a deciding role in the choice of her future husband. Isolde's words have a significant meaning because they foreshadow Tristram's future decision to bring Isolde as a wife to his uncle Mark, a decision I will discuss later in the chapter. What we have seen so far is that love has grown between Tristram and Isolde. However, Malory then portrays the love between Tristram and Isolde as not as loyal as the love between Launcelot and Guinevere, something we can see through Tristram's behavior.

When comparing Lancelot-Guinevere and Tristram-Isolde, it seems like only Lancelot and Guinevere can be recognized as true lovers who remain faithful to each other. Indeed, while Launcelot renounces to fall in love and marry someone else than Guinevere even though she tells him he can, Tristram almost immediately falls in love with another woman named Lady Segwarides when he comes back to Cornwall. This makes Tristram's romantic feelings for the

ladies he meets, including La Belle Isolde, quite shallow compared to Launcelot's feelings for Guinevere:

> And this lady loved sir Trystrames passingly well, and he loved hir agayne, for she was a passynge fayre lady and that aspyed sir Trystrames well. […] and so they soupede lightly and wente to bedde with grete joy and plesaunce. (*Works*, 244-245)
>
> (This lady loved Sir Tristram passingly well, and he loved her again; for she was a passing fair lady, and that espied Sir Tristram well. […] And so they supped lightly, went to bed with great joy and pleasance.) (*Winchester*, 186-187)

Tristram's main motive to love his ladies shows his lack of attachment: he does not love them because of their moral qualities but because they are physically beautiful, "passynge fayre" (*Works*, 244) for Lady Segwarides and the "fairest lady" (*Works*, 238) for Isolde. Tristram exchanges rings with Isolde in Ireland, but has sexual intercourse with another woman when he comes back to Cornwall. Apart from his commitment to king Mark, a king he has volunteered to serve, Tristram is independent and has several brief love affairs. But we will see that Tristram's romantic freedom and shallowness come to an end when he drinks a love potion which binds him to La Belle Isolde.

Tristram, unlike Launcelot, does not appear to be loyal to one woman. I suggest that Tristram's loyalty to Isolde only comes after a love potion forces him to remain in love with her for the rest of his life. Tristram's love for Isolde is strengthened, but not because of a natural affection like Launcelot and Guinevere. Instead, his loyalty only exists because of magic. When Tristram tells king Mark about his adventures in Ireland and his encounter with the very beautiful princess named Isolde, Mark asks him to go to Ireland and to come back with princess Isolde because a wedding between Mark and Isolde would unify the kingdoms of Ireland and Cornwall. Tristram goes back to Ireland with the promise of bringing princess Isolde to his

uncle. Before leaving Ireland, the queen Isolde prepares a love potion for her daughter and king Mark to make sure that there will be love between them. On the way back to Cornwall, Tristram and Isolde are thirsty and Gouvernail and Brangain – Tristram's squire and Isolde's maidservant – give them the love potion instead of some wine. Tristram and Isolde suddenly fall deeply in love:

> But by that drynke was in their bodyes they loved aythir other so well that never his love departed, for well nother for woo. And thus hit happed first, the love betwyxte sir Trystames and La Beale Isode, the whyche love never departed dayes of their lyff. (*Works*, 258)
>
> (But by that drink was in their bodies, they loved either other so well that never their love departed, for weal nor for woe. And this is happed first the love betwixt Sir Tristram and La Belle Isode, the which love never departed days of their life.) (*Winchester,* 195)

With the repetition of the words "never departed" there is the idea of a never-ending love between the knight and his lady, which is accentuated with the addition that they will love each other until their deaths. The equivalent scene of the love potion in Malory's source, the prose *Tristan,* also presents the knight and the princess falling in love after drinking it:

> Maintenant qu'il ont beü li uns regarde l'autre, et sont aussi com uit esbahi. Or pensent a autre chose qu'il ne pensoient devant. Tristanz pense a Yselt, et Yselt a Tristan. Toz est ebliez li rois Mars. Tritranz ne demande autre chose fors que l'amor d'Yselt. (*Tristan II*, 65)
>
> (Now that they have drunk, they look at each other and are instantly astonished. They think about something that they have never thought about before. Tristan thinks about Isolde, and Isolde about Tristan. King Mark is all forgotten. Tristan asks for nothing else but for Isolde's love.)

Both works describe Tristram and Isolde's love as powerful and lasting in time. *Le Morte Darthur* focuses on the long-lasting effects of the potion: it is said twice that "love never departed" (*Works*, 258) between Tristram and Isolde. Love was already present between them and the love potion only makes their romantic feelings impossible to cease. The prose *Tristan* focuses on the strong power of the love potion: there was no love between them prior to the love potion, and their love, a love *qu'il ne pensoient devant* (they never thought about before) (*Tristan II*, 65), is sudden. The major difference between the *Morte Darthur* and the prose *Tristan* is Malory making Tristram and Isolde love each other before drinking the potion. Charles Moorman in "The Book of Kyng Arthur" argues that Malory "humanized Tristan (and, of course, Isode) by having him fall in love with Isode long before the administration of the love potion" (Moorman, 88). However, I see another strategy in making them fall in love before they drink love potion, one that reinforces the strength of the love potion. Before drinking it, Tristram and Isolde's love looks like a simple affair he has while he is healing at the Irish court. He does not seem to miss Isolde, and he quickly falls in love with another woman, Lady Segwarides, with whom he has sex. Before the potion, Tristram loved Isolde but he was not loyal to her. After drinking the potion however, Tristram misses Isolde and he is unable to engage in sexual intercourse with other women: the love potion is what makes Tristram sexually faithful to Isolde. So, contrary to Launcelot and Guinevere, whose faithfulness was achieved without artifice and in chastity, Tristram and Isolde's loyalty is not chaste and requires witchcraft to be attained.

The theme of the love potion binding Tristram and Isolde together is common to both the *Morte Darthur* and the prose *Tristan*: while they might love each other before drinking the potion in the *Morte Darthur*, their love transcends everything else only because of its magical power. In her article "The impotent potion: on the minimization of the love theme in the 'Tristran en Prose' and Malory's 'Morte Darthur'", Maureen Fries explains that "Tristan and

Isolde are united in guilt by a force outside, rather than primarily within, themselves. […] The potion, and not the person(s), determines the trajectory of the lovers' career" (Fries, 75). Her argument is that the role and strength of the love potion is minimized in the prose *Tristan* and the *Morte Darthur* compared to earlier texts[13] narrating the story of Tristram and Isolde because love is present between them before they drink it. It might be very true that the strength of the potion in the earlier versions is stronger than in the *Morte Darthur* and his French source, but the potion's strength in these two works should nonetheless not be underestimated. Fries writes that "the French romance [the prose *Tristan*] offers us a Tristan who is absent from Isolde for long periods with no visible effect upon his person. Malory's version is even more cavalier in its treatment of the supposedly powerful aphrodisiac." (Fries, 76-77). In fact, Tristram being away from Isolde has visible effects upon his person in both the prose *Tristan* and the *Morte Darthur*. First, in the prose *Tristan*, when he has gone on some adventures and has not seen La Belle Isolde for one year, it is said that:

> Si lli sovint qu'il avoit un an qu'il avoit perdue la roïne Yselt de Cornoaille; si est tant durement dolenz qu'il voudroit bien estre morz, so comence a plorer mout forment. (*Tristan II*, 166)
>
> (He remembers he has not seen the queen Isolde of Cornwall for a year; he is in so much pain that he wishes he was dead, and he starts sobbing)

As for the *Morte Darthur*, it is clear that Tristram does not feel well when he is separated from Isolde, as:

> Without the syghte of her syr Tristram might not endure. (*Works*, 376)

[13] The earlier texts Fries in referring to are the Old French poem *Tristan*, written by Thomas of Britain, a Norman poem called *Le Roman de Tristan* written by Béroul, *Tristan and Isolt* written in Middle High German by Gottfried von Strassburg, and another Middle High German roman called *Tristrant* and written by Eilhart von Oberge. All of them were written during the 12th century, before the French prose *Tristan*. However, since they are not part of Malory's sources for the *Morte Darthur*, they are not studied in this thesis.

(Without the sight of her Sir Tristram might not endure.) (*Winchester,* 239)

Both passages illustrate Tristram's dependence on Isolde, and the power the love potion has on him. Tristram's suffering is transcribed with words such as *dolenz* (pain), *morz* (dead), *plorer* (cry), or "endure". The reminder that Tristram does not feel well because he misses Isolde contrasts with the absence of such comment before he drank the love potion: the magical link between Tristram and Isolde is not forgotten, and it illustrates that Tristram truly cares about Isolde because he is linked to her by higher forces. Like Launcelot and Guinevere, Tristram and Isolde's relationship is powerful, but unlike the lovers from Camelot, the Tristram-Isolde bond is not presented as virtuous but as the result of a cheating device made to have two people deeply loving each other.

We have seen that the lasting effects of the potion are apparent, and I turn now to the study of the strength of this magical link. In the prose *Tristan,* after drinking the potion, Tristram and Isolde's desire for each other is strong, passionate and uncontrollable. Tristram claims he desires no one else but Isolde, and Isolde desires no one else but Tristram. Their desire leads them to consume their relationship moments after drinking the potion:

> Il sont en chambre sol a seul […] Il fait de li ce que il veust et li tost le non de pucele. (*Tristran II*, 67)
>
> (They are alone in the room. […] He does what he wants with her and she loses the status of virgin.)

In his article entitled "The Love Potion in the French Prose *Tristan*", Alan Fedrick claims that the love potion has "a violent effect on Tristan and Iseut: something wholly revolutionary is taking place. […] before drinking the potion they do not dream of committing what is called a *vilenie* (vileness); but after they have drunk it, this is precisely what they do commit, with enthusiasm" (29). In the *Morte Darthur*, the physical desire between the new lovers is not

immediate after drinking the potion. There are no further details as to what happens on the ship after the love potion is drunk. The sentence which immediately follows starts with "so than they sayled" (*Works,* 258), suggesting that the ship has departed. In the "Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones", Malory explicitly evokes Tristram and Isolde being in bed together, but it takes place once Tristram and Isolde are back to Cornwall:

> And there sir Trystrames was takyn nakyd a-bed with La Beale Isode. (*Works,* 271)
>
> (and there Sir Tristram was taken naked abed with La Belle Isode.) (*Winchester,* 204)

Hanks states in his article that Tristram and Isolde's relationship becomes "tarnished" (Hanks, 26) at that point of the story because "the two are caught *in flagrante delicto*[14] early in the Tristram-book" (Hanks, 26). What Hanks forgets to mention is that Tristram and Isolde's relationship is already tarnished in the *Morte Darthur* even before they drink the love potion and go naked in bed together. Before going back to Ireland to get Isolde for his uncle the king Mark, Tristram meets Lady Segwarides, falls in love and have sex with her. His affair with Lady Segwarides makes his relationship with Isolde less unique, or tarnishes it, because she is not the only woman he loves. Moreover, he sleeps with Lady Segwarides while is he not under the influence of a love potion, and Tristram's behavior thus cannot be excused. The relationship between Tristram and Lady Segwarides is the perfect example which illustrates Malory's comment that sexual love is short-lived: their love does not last more than three pages in the whole *Morte Darthur*, and Lady Segwarides is not mentioned after. What Hanks also forgets to mention is that the love potion is the reason why the love between Tristram and Isolde grows stronger: Tristram being found naked in the same bed as Isolde could be explained on the potion and its secondary effects. The lovers might have waited and not consumed their relationship on the boat, but the potion is strong enough to make them go in bed naked together. Even if the

[14] The italics are Hanks', not mine.

powerful potion can potentially explain why the lovers cannot control themselves and engage in sexual intercourses, what really matters is that in the *Morte Darthur* Tristram and Isolde's relationship is never presented as unique or as a virtuous love like the relationship between Launcelot and Guinevere is, because their strong bond is due to magic intervention.

Hanks also believes that the relationship between Tristram and Isolde is tarnished when Tristram later "marries another Isode – Isode le Blaunche Maynes – because she is lovely and well born" (Hanks, 26), and I will now study Tristram's relationship with that second Isolde. Tristram's meeting with the Isolde les Blanches Mains – the Isolde he will marry – is very similar to his meeting with La Belle Isolde, so much so that Isolde les Blanches Mains appears as a substitute of La Belle Isolde. Tristram and Isolde by king Mark, who has discovered that his wife and his nephew love each other. Mark takes Isolde with him in his castle, and Tristram is hurt by with a poisoned arrow. Tristram is told that his wound can be healed by a woman named Isolde who lives in Brittany. Tristram goes in Brittany, and like La Belle Isolde who has healed him in Ireland, Isolde les Blanches Mains heals Tristram in Brittany. Also, similar to Tristram falling in love with La Belle Isolde, Tristram falls in love with Isolde les Blanches Mains:

> "There grewe grete love betwyxte Isode and Sir Trystrames, for that lady was bothe good and fayren, and a woman of noble bloode and fame. And for because that sir Trystrames had suche chere and riches and all other plesaunce that he had allmoste forsakyn La Beale Isode." (*Works*, 273)
>
> ("There grew great love betwixt Isode and Sir Tristram; for that lady was both good and fair and a woman of noble blood and fame, and for because that Sir Tristram had such cheer and riches and all other pleasance that he had almost forsaken La Belle Isode.) (*Winchester*, 207)

Isolde les Blanches Mains' description is very close to La Belle Isode's, who is said to be "the fairest lady and maydyn of the worlde." (*Works*, 238) (the fairest lady and maiden of the world). For both of them, the only characteristics mentioned are their noble births, their high beauty, and their ability to heal Tristram. They share the same name but Isolde les Blanches Mains is the Isolde that Tristram can marry because what distinguishes them is Isolde les Blanches Mains not being married nor promised to any man. In the prose *Tristan*, her having the same name as La Belle Isolde is said to be the reason of Tristram's love:

> Il regarde mout volentiers Yselt por la biauté qu'il voit en li, […] et la chose qui plus le tret a s'amor et li nons d'Yselt, car il li semble que se de ceste Yselt la compaignie avoir et la joie, ja d'autre Yselt ne li sovendroit. […] Il lesse l'une Yselt por l'autre, et cuide bien oblier l'amour de l'une por l'amor de l'autre. (*Tristan II*, 156-157)
>
> (He looks at Isolde with pleasure because of the beauty he sees in her […] and the thing he is attracted the most to is the name of Isolde, because it seems to him that he will take pleasure with this Isolde, already the other Isolde is forgotten. […] He leaves one Isolde for another, and he thinks about forgetting the love of the first for the love of the second.)

When Hanks declares that Tristram "marries another Isode – Isode le Blaunche Maynes – because she is lovely and well born" (Hanks, 26), it is not false, but it is her similarity with La Belle Isolde which acts as the decisive factor in him falling in love – explicitly written in the French source and more subtly so in the *Morte Darthur*. Contrary to Lady Segwarides, whom Tristram fell in love with because she was "passynge fayre" (*Works*, 244), I believe that like in the prose *Tristan*, Tristram falls in love with Isolde les Blanches Mains in the *Morte Darthur* because of her name.

I have mentioned that Isolde les Blanches Mains is a substitute of La Belle Isolde, and I go further and suggest that Tristram falls in love with Isolde les Blanches Mains because of

his love for La Belle Isolde, and because the two Isolde are similar: they have the same name, they are both described as beautiful and they both heal Tristram. When healed by the woman named Isolde from Brittany, Tristram is reliving the encounter he had with La Belle Isolde when she healed him in Ireland. In marrying another woman named Isolde, Tristram's hope is that he will manage to forget La Belle Isolde. I see Tristram marrying Isolde les Blanches Mains as a strategy to change the past and show the "Tristram and Isolde"[15] relationship as a valid one, a new start without any previous unloyalty from Tristram's part, a relationship where he has no knightly duty to bring the woman he loves to his uncle and where Tristram is instead able to marry her. By having a "new" Isolde, whom Tristram starts to love and never cheats on, the "Tristram and Isolde" relationship would become even stronger than the relationship between Launcelot and Guinevere: both linked through love are not through some magical artifice, but with Tristram and Isolde being in addition legally married to each other. But by marrying another woman, Tristram also lacks loyalty and fidelity towards La Belle Isolde, qualities that will be restored thanks to the powerful love potion.

We have seen that adultery in the *Morte Darthur* is not a problem in itself as long as both lovers manage to maintain their loyalty in each other: Launcelot and Guinevere manage to do so, and they are seen as true lovers. However, the adulterous relationship between Tristram and Isolde is problematic almost from the beginning because of Tristram's infidelity with Lady Segwarides. Although removing the "old" Isolde of Ireland by the "new" Isolde of Brittany is presented as a possibility, it is never possible in reality because at the exact moment La Belle Isolde seems to be part of Tristram's past and replaced by Isolde les Blanches Mains, the strong and ever-lasting power of the love potion haunts him. When he is in bed with Isolde les Blanches Mains, now his wife, and is ready to consummate his relationship with her, Tristram

[15] I put it in quotations marks because more than the characters, it refers to the whole ideal of the love between Tristram and Isolde.

remembers La Belle Isolde and he is unable to have any sexual relationship with Isolde les Blanches Mains:

> And so whan they were a-bed bothe, sir Trystrames remembirde hym of his olde lady, La Beale Isode, and than he toke suche a thoughte suddeynly that he was all dysmayde and other chere made he none but with clyppynge and kissing. As for other fleyshely lustys, sir Trystrames had never ado with hir. (*Works*, 273)

> And so when they were abed both, Sir Tristram remembered him of his previous lady La Belle Isode, and then he took such a thought suddenly that he was all dismayed. And other cheer made he none but with clipping and kissing; as for freshly lusts, Sir Tristram had never ado with her. (*Winchester*, 207)

The corresponding episode in the prose *Tristan* also differentiates between the two Isolde and describe Tristram's inability to engage in a sexual relationship with Isolde les Blanches Mains:

> Et Tristanz la bese et acole. Mes quant il li sovient de Yselt de Cornoaille, il n'a pas cuer de tochier a ceste. En tel maniere demore Tristan o sa moillier. (*Tristan II*, 162)

> (And Tristram kisses and embraces her. But when he remembers Isolde of Cornwall, he cannot touch this Isolde. This is how it will be between Tristram and his wife.)

Tristram remembering La Belle Isolde when he is about to have physical intercourse with Isolde les Blanches Mains cannot be explained without looking at the powerful love potion and his past love with Lady Segwarides.

I maintain that the potion controls Tristram, and that its power is what makes him have physical intercourse with La Belle Isolde but also prevents him from sleeping him anyone. It seems like by sleeping with his own wife Isolde les Blanches Mains, Tristram would cheat on La Belle Isolde and is incapable of doing it, something he was able to do with Lady Segwarides.

However, Tristram and Lady Segwarides' relationship happened before his return to Ireland, and before drinking the love potion. The difference in Tristram's behavior would explain why the physical aspect of Tristram and La Belle Isolde's relationship is present in the *Morte Darthur* contrary to Launcelot and Guinevere. Because of the love potion's power, what Tristram can do with La Belle Isolde, he is unable to do with others. The magical love potion makes Tristram faithful and loyal to la Belle Isolde when it comes to sexual relationships. Hanks argues that Tristram and Isolde's relationship has a negative impact on the relationship between Launcelot and Guinevere:

> "What Malory did was to present the Tristram-Isode affair as a great love, to be sure, but at a great love distinctly tarnished at the edges. He removed virtually all the tarnish from the Lancelot-Guinevere affair […] but in showing us the parallel love as stained, he comments subtly about the nature of the Lancelot-Guinevere relationship." (Hanks, 25)

According to Hanks, Malory not removing all the physical adulterous content between Tristram and Isolde condemns Launcelot and Guinevere because the two relationships are similar. However, I see Tristram and Isolde's relationship as having a positive impact on the relationship between Launcelot and Guinevere because Tristram and Isolde's loyalty is presented as not as naturally chaste, strong and genuine as the one between Launcelot and Guinevere. Launcelot and Guinevere are the ones who are true lovers, who achieve redemption, and not Tristram and Isolde who are bound together artificially through magic.

Tristram and Isolde's relationship has a positive impact on the relationship between Launcelot and Guinevere. This is correlated by Launcelot's reaction upon learning that Tristram has married another woman than La Belle Isolde. Launcelot the true and faithful lover does not understand how Tristram is able to be untrue to his lady, and he shows his discontent to Arthur:

> "Fye upon hym, untrew knyght to his lady! That so noble a knyght as sir Trystrames is sholde be founde to his fyrst lady and love untrew, that is the quene of Cornwayle!" (*Works*, 273)
>
> "Fie upon him, untrue knight to his lady! That so noble a knight as Sir Tristram is should be found to his first lady and love untrue, that is the queen of Cornwall!" (*Winchester*, 207-208)

Through Launcelot's reaction we can see the opposition between the two knights when it comes to loyalty. For Launcelot, it appears shocking that such a strong knight like Tristram is unable to stay true to his lover. Launcelot sees Tristram's decision to marry another woman than La Belle Isolde as unworthy of his reputation as a noble knight, and we can see Launcelot's deception expressed with his vocabulary: the word "fye" (fie) illustrates his disgust and outrage towards Tristram, and twice he uses the word "untrew" (untrue) to describe Tristram as a lover. While Launcelot refuses all his life to marry another woman in order to remain Guinevere's faithful knight, Tristram's love for Isolde is presented as unstable, and by having Launcelot react to Tristram's instability in loyal love, the *Morte Darthur* makes the Launcelot-Guinevere an example of loyalty in comparison.

I have established that the love between Tristram and Isolde does not start with the love potion, but that the potion amplifies their love, a powerful love which lasts until their tragic deaths. When Tristram is reminded of his magical bond with La Belle Isolde, he leaves Isolde les Blanches Mains and reunites with La Belle Isolde, which proves that the power of the love potion is stronger than any other romantic feelings Tristram may have for other women. As such, Schueler claims that "Tristram's affair does not end unhappily" (Schueler, 60) because both Tristram and Isolde are together alive at the end of the "Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones". I disagree with him because in the previous versions of the Tristram and Isolde's story as well as in the *Morte Darthur*, the story ends tragically, albeit not in the "Book of Sir Tristram de

Lyones", but later. Versions vary in the texts prior to the *Morte Darthur*, but Tristram either dies or is killed in all of them, and Isolde dies soon thereafter. In the prose *Tristan*, Isolde speaks to a dead Tristram before killing herself:

> "Et certes puis que vous estes mort je ne quier plus vivre après vous. Car puis que l'amour a este entre vous et moy a la vie, bien doit estre a la mort." Lors l'embrace de ses bras contre son pis si fort qu'elle peult et se pasme sur le corps et jette ung souspir, e le cœur lui part et l'âme s'en va. Tout ainsi furent mors les deux amans Tristan et Yseult. (*Romania*, 507)
>
> ("And since you are dead, I do not desire to outlive you because the love that was between you and me for life has to also be in death." She embraces him, pressing her arms against his chest as strong as she could, and she faints on his body in a last gasp, and her heart leaves and her soul goes. This was how the two lovers Tristan and Isolde died)

In that scene, Isolde's death is described with words such as "pasme" (faints) and "souspir" (gasp), allowing the reader to fully grasp how tragic her death is. In the *Morte Darthur*, Malory comments and reveals that King Mark has killed Tristram because of Tristram and Isolde's love for each other:

> Also that […] kynge slew […] sir Trystram as he sate harpynge afore hys lady, La Beall Isode, with a trenchaunte glaive, for whos dethe was the moste waylynge of ony knyght that ever was in kynge Arthurs dayes […] And La Beall Isode dyed sownyng upon the crosse of sir Trystram, whereof was grete pité. (*Works*, 666)
>
> Also that […] king slew […] Sir Tristram, as he sat harping before his lady La Belle Isode, with a trenchant glaive, for whose death was the most wailing of any knight that

> ever was in King Arthur's days […] And La Belle Isode died swooning upon the corpse of Sir Tristram, whereof was great pity. (*Winchester,* 463)

Tristram and Isolde tragic ending is very different from Launcelot and Guinevere's repentance and holy deaths. Religious redemption is not granted to the Cornish lovers, and slaughter occurs instead. I interpret Tristram-Isolde and Launcelot-Guinevere's different outcomes as an implicit comment by Malory on the importance of genuine loyalty when other relationships in the *Morte Darthur* seem to lack virtue and honesty.

So, this chapter presented Tristram and Isolde's story as centered around the love potion that binds them together. Love exists between them before, but a strong magical link is created when they drink the potion. Tristram is an adventurous knight who loves to hunt, and his hunting behavior is also present in his relation to ladies: he first falls in love with the Irish princess La Belle Isolde, then with lady Segwarides in Cornwall, is then reunited with La Belle Isolde before marrying Isolde les Blanches Mains from Brittany and finally reuniting once again with La Belle Isolde. Unlike Launcelot, Tristram is not loyal to one woman, and unlike Launcelot and Guinevere, Tristram and Isolde's loyalty is not natural but magical. As a consequence, the lovers are not rewarded redemption and Malory does not say that they are true or virtuous. Instead, they suffer tragic deaths.

In this section I have presented the two main adulterous relationships of the *Morte Darthur*: the relationship between Launcelot and Guinevere and the relationship between Tristram and Isolde. Malory has adopted different strategies concerning the presence or the absence of physical adultery. I believe that he has removed the sexualized courtly love of the French sources for Launcelot and Guinevere to put forward their chaste loyalty and love while he has kept it for Tristram and Isolde to illustrate the potion's power which forbids Tristram to engage in a sexual intercourse with Isolde les Blanches Mains. Launcelot and Guinevere enter the religious life and repent themselves whereas Tristram and Isolde are not offered such penitence which leads me to see it as Malory's personal comment on their relationship, and the importance of genuine loyalty. However, despite their different types of loyalties and their different endings, I see a common consequence due to both adulterous relationships: the strength and power of their adulterous bonds, natural or magical, disrupt the power balance of the kingdoms because the queens are more faithful to their lovers than to their husbands. Malory's interest seems to be on what happens behinds adultery, on something more important and destructive: the political plot working with rivalries and distrust among knights and kings. I turn now to the following section to examine my suggestion that in the *Morte Darthur*, adultery is used to expand the political scheme.

SECTION 2

Personal conflicts and a quest for political power: disloyalties in the relationships between men leading to chaos and death

In the first section we have seen that in comparison to its sources, the *Morte Darthur* presents the two main adulterous relationships differently: the sexualized content is reduced for the Launcelot-Guinevere story, and Malory makes the lovers a model of loyalty because he believes that relationships where sex is involved do not last. The love between Launcelot and Guinevere lasts until their deaths and the physical encounters that were numerous in the *Morte Darthur*'s French sources are removed. For the Tristram-Isolde story however, the sexual content is not removed and I believe that keeping it is a well-thought process in the *Morte Darthur*: after mistakenly drinking a love potion which binds Tristram and Isolde together for the rest of their lives, Tristram only remains faithful to Isolde because the potion makes him unable to have sex with other women than her. Sexualized content is kept for Tristram and Isolde because their love is already ever-lasting due to the potion, they are an exception to Malory's vision.

In this section I argue that in reducing the sexualized content of the Launcelot and Guinevere story, Malory also prepares the readers of the *Morte Darthur* to pay more attention on the internal conflicts between the knights of the Round Table. Malory's removal of the sexualized content bring a new emphasis on politics because the faithful aspect of Launcelot and Guinevere's relationship is prioritized over the diminished adultery story: Guinevere and Lancelot are still a threat to the kingdom, no longer because of their sexual encounters as in the French books, but because of their mutual trust and virtue. *Le Morte Darthur* presents Launcelot and Guinevere's relationship as a political threat used to tear the kingdom apart rather than a romantic threat as in the French source. Guinevere and Lancelot being true lovers in private

appears as a political threat in public because Guinevere is often associated with Lancelot, more than with her husband the king. Launcelot is Guinevere's favorite knight, and it creates a problem concerning political dependence because Guinevere being seen with Launcelot is "politically dangerous" (Hodges, 63): their intimate relationship goes beyond the lovers and affects the whole kingdom with the knights' repeated attempts to bring shame on Launcelot and Guinevere by publicly revealing the adultery to the court. Thus, the political dimension of their relationship appears more threatening than the romantic one, and the study of various episodes of the *Morte Darthur* will serve as pieces of evidences proving that Launcelot and Guinevere's adultery is a motive for a bigger political scheme and will allow me to explain that Camelot is first and foremost threatened by its own factional rivalries and the distrust within the Round Table: adultery is a pawn in the masculine political dispute.

In this section I will also analyze Tristram's death as the result of the homosocial show of power and the masculine environment present in the kingdom, more than because of the love potion and his adulterous relationship with Isolde. Tristram's tragic death might appear at first as the result of his illicit adulterous love with his uncle's wife, which gives king Mark a motive to kill Tristram, but it is Mark who remains the one responsible for Tristram's death. Since Tristram is opposite of what Mark is – the best knight of the realm, liked and respected by his fellow Cornish knights, and bound to La Belle Isolde – Tristram represents a personal and political threat for the king and is eliminated by him.

So, at the end of the section, it will become apparent that the collapse of the kingdoms of Camelot and Cornwall is a result of the masculine conflicts sparked by hate and revenge, and of the kings going against their best knight – Launcelot for Arthur, and Tristram for Mark – and not because of the heterosexual adulterous relationships.

Chapter 1

Camelot: from a romantic tragedy to an emphasis on violence, lack of unity and revenge among the knights of the Round Table

In Malory's French sources, Launcelot and Guinevere are perceived as romantic threats to Arthur. The romantic content is less present in Malory's English source the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur*. In the *Morte Darthur*, through textual removals and additions made by Malory, their romantic connection is further diminished and I argue that Launcelot and Guinevere represent political threats for the kingdom more than romantic threats for Arthur. In this chapter I demonstrate that Malory's changes from his French sources in relation to the Launcelot-Guinevere-Arthur triad bring a new emphasis on the knights' fellowship and on politics rather than on adultery and on courtly love. I also demonstrate that the relationship between Launcelot and Guinevere is only a factor in the collapse of the Round Table, a motive for a bigger political scheme that is about the quest of power in the factional rivalries and loyalties, about the disunity and distrust within the Round Table. In order to illustrate how adultery is overpowered by the personal conflicts and the quest for power ending in chaos in the *Morte Darthur*, I will discuss three episodes taking place in the "Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere": the Poisoned Apple, the Knight of the Cart and the Healing of Sir Urry. I will examine how the internal conflicts and factional rivalries are aggravated by Agravaine and Mordred's desire to publicly reveal Lancelot and Guinevere's love to Arthur and to the court by trapping the lovers. A special focus will be put on Agravaine's warning(s) to Arthur and, with Launcelot's subsequent reaction to Agravaine trapping him, I will show that politics have taken over romance. This chapter will also discuss the correlation between power and revenge because the vengeful knights (Pinel, Agravaine, Meliagaunt…) and Arthur are driven by envy, hate, and jealousy in order to maintain or gain power, or bring chaos.

In the introduction of the second section, I have stated that by getting closer to Guinevere, Launcelot exposes himself to the threat of political favoritism because his close relationship with Guinevere and his influence are indirect powers he has over other knights. Launcelot is known to be the "beste knyght of the worlde" (best knight of the world) (*Works*, 58) and the "moste man of worship of the worlde" (most man of worship of the world) (*Works*, 76). Launcelot's supremacy over the other knights of the Round Table is quickly established in the *Morte Darthur*, and that comes with several privileges. First, he is respected by the other knights and even by Arthur who says to Launcelot, "I am sure ye be the best knyght of the worlde" ("I am sure you are the best knight of the world") (*Works*, 517). Second, Launcelot gains the privilege of being Arthur's close counsellor. For example, when Arthur is sad that his knights might not come back alive from the Grail quest, it is Launcelot's advice Arthur wants to hear:

> The terys began to renne downe by hys vysayge, and therewith the kynge seyde: "A, curteyse knyght, sir Launcelot! I require you that ye counceyle me." (*Works*, 523)
>
> (The tears began to run down by his face. And therewith the King said: "Ah, courteous knight, Sir Lancelot, I require you that ye counsel me.") (Winchester, 319)

More than a counsellor, Launcelot also appears to be a close friend to Arthur, someone the king can come to when he feels sad and needs comfort and reassurance. Launcelot's status of best knight of the realm and close counsellor as well as friend to Arthur makes him politically powerful. In this chapter, we will see that Launcelot's close relation to power makes some of the other knights afraid of him, jealous of him and eager to bring shame on him. What is going to be used by those envious and vengeful knights is Launcelot's relationship with Guinevere. His relationship with Guinevere makes him gain even more political power because he is the queen's favorite knight, but it is also a weakness because it is used against him with the purpose of turning Arthur against Launcelot and altering the power dynamics of the kingdom.

In "Love versus Politics: competing paradigms of Chivalry in Malory's 'Morte Darthur'", Danielle Morgan MacBain asserts that the existing love between Guinevere and Launcelot "which places a knight's loyalty away from its ideal focal point – his feudal lord – threatens the very heart of the political order, as it weakens the ties that bind the knights together" (MacBain, 25). I agree with MacBain that Guinevere and Launcelot constitute a threat to the kingdom. However, I believe that the political scandal does not happen because of Launcelot and Guinevere's adultery but because of Agravaine's jealousy and hatred towards Launcelot which makes him trap the lovers in Guinevere's room and reveal their relationship publicly to the whole kingdom. Adultery is, I believe, the means chosen by Malory to emphasize the distrust and rivalry bringing down the Round Table: the adulterous relationship between Launcelot and Guinevere is politicized to illustrate the lack of loyalty among the knights who are part of rival affinities.

The term "affinity", which will be used throughout the chapter, is defined by Kenneth Hodges as "networks […] in which superiors promoted and protected those underneath them, and men and women offered service in return" (Hodges, 56). The main "superiors" Hodges refers to are King Arthur, but also the best and most powerful knights that are Gawain, Lamorak, Launcelot, and Tristram. This means that all the knights are loyal to the king, but some are more loyal to other knights. Sir Bors for example is closer to his cousin Launcelot than to Arthur, while Agravaine, Gaheris and Gareth are closer to their brother Gawain and they follow him and obey him first, not Arthur. What is more harmful than liking one of the "superiors" is the dislike of others. Hodges comments that:

> The rivalry between the affinities has become intense. Launcelot has to caution his kinsmen not to kill Trystram in their fear that he might be eclipsing Launcelot's fame; Gawain's brothers attack knights who claim Launcelot is a better knight than Gawain; and famously Lamorak's faction is feuding with Gawain's. (Hodges, 56)

The term affinity illustrates that tensions have long existed between the knights of the Round Table, and it is far from being united. Knights are plotting against each other to weaken the affinities of their rivals by shaming or killing them, resulting in a rise of tensions.

One episode of the *Morte Darthur* that exemplifies the rise of tension will now be analyzed. This episode is known as "The Poisoned Apple" and takes place just after the quest for the Holy Grail has ended. While the adulterous relationship between Launcelot and Guinevere is the reason why this episode takes place in the first place, the Poisoned Apple confirms that adultery in the *Morte Darthur* serves a bigger political scheme that is about masculine rivalries between the knights. Indeed, I suggest that the Poisoned Apple episode, originally written to have Guinevere sentenced to death, is used by Malory to illustrate the maliciousness of the knights of the Round Table to get rid of other knights. For the study of this episode, I will first look at the versions present in the French *Mort Artu* and in the English *Stanzaic Morte Arthur* and then explain what changes Malory has made. The episode finds its origin in the *Mort Artu* and takes place after the knights have returned from the Grail quest. A dinner is hosted at the court of Camelot, there is much food on the tables and apples are served close to Guinevere. A knight named Avarlan is said to hate Gawain, and Avarlan decides to put poison in one of the apples in order to kill Gawain. He expects the queen to give it to Gawain, but it does not go as planned because Guinevere gives the apple to someone else:

> La reïne prist le fruit, qui de la traïson ne se gardoit; si en dona a un chevalier qui estoit compains de la Table Reonde et avoit non Gaheris de Karaheu. (*Mort Artu,* 61)
>
> (The queen, who did not know the fruit was poisoned, took it and gave it to a knight member of the companions of the Round Table named Gaheris of Karaheu.)

Because she was the one who gave the apple to Gaheris of Karaheu, Guinevere is blamed for his death and she is condemned to die even if she had nothing to do with it. In the *Mort Artu*,

Avarlan's poisoning does not really matter, the emphasis is not put on him or on Gaheris of Karaheu's death but on Guinevere's condemnation to death. In the English *Stanzaic Morte Arthur*, the story is almost the same than one in the *Mort Artu*, but the poisoner's identity remains unknown and is simply known be to a squire. Gaheris of Karaheu is replaced by a Scottish knight visitor to Arthur's court. In the *Stanzaic*, it does not matter who is poisoned and who is the real culprit: none of them are knights of the Round Table, one is a "squier" (squire) (*Stanzaic*, 840) and the other comes from "an encouthe stede." (a foreign place) (*Stanzaic*, 851). Like in the *Mort Artu*, it is not so much about knowing the knights' names and their backgrounds but about Guinevere being accused of murder and condemned.

In the *Morte Darthur*, Malory follows the events of the French *Mort Artu* and the English *Stanzaic Morte Darthur* with a dinner being hosted at the court and Gawain being the target of a poisoning. What is added in the *Morte Dathur* however is a reason to host the dinner. It is because Guinevere is aware that her close bond with Launcelot might create jealousy or suspicion among the other knights that she decides to invite all of them to a dinner to counter possible accusations of favoritism and show that they are all treated equally:

> So the quene lete make a privy dynere in London unto the knyghtes of the Rownde Table, and all was for to shew outwarde that she had as grete joy in all other knyghtes of the Rounde Table as she had in sir Launcelot. (*Works*, 613)
>
> (So the queen let make a private dinner in London for the knights of the Round Table, and all was for to show outwardly that she had as great joy in all other knights of the Round Table as she had in Sir Launcelot) (*Winchester*, 405)

In his article on "Guivenere's Politics in Malory's 'Morte Darthur'", Kenneth Hodges explains that the dinner has a "serious political purpose of bridging factional divides" (Hodges, 64) but that "the result is political disaster and precisely opposite of what Guinevere intended. Instead

of bringing the affinities together, the episode drives them further apart" (Hodges, 66). I agree with Hodges and add that the affinities are also driven apart because of Malory's alteration of the knights' names.

Several changes in name are made by Malory when narrating the Poisoned Apple episode such as Sir Mador de la Porte, a knight who is Gaheris's brother in the *Mort Artu* and becomes Sir Patrise's cousin in the *Morte Darthur*. Other changes I believe are most significant and done for a specific purpose: to make the poisoner (Sir Pinel), the intended victim (Gawain) and the real victim (Sir Patrise) are all part of the Round Table. Gaheris and the Scottish knight of Malory's sources become the Irish Sir Patrise, a knight part of the Round Table. The knight named Avarlan responsible of the poisoning in the *Mort Artu* is replaced by Sir Pinel, another knight of the Round Table. So, in comparison to his sources, the focus appears to be on the betrayal between the knights of the Round Table rather than on the adulterous relationship. Guinevere is still accused of murder, but what the episode of the Poisoned Apple demonstrates is that Guinevere tries to bring peace and unity among her husband's knights but fails because of the lack of trust and unity among the knights who are divided by affinities. The dinner scene results in the queen being wrongfully accused of poisoning, which reinforces the tensions within the Round Table because it "casts obvious suspicion on Launcelot's affinity […] and on the queen in particular" since "her ties to Launcelot give her motive" to poison Gawain (Hodges, 66). Launcelot and Guinevere's relationship jeopardizes the political balance of the kingdom because Launcelot is the queen's knight who always defends her and represents her during the tournaments. As a consequence of their close bond, Guinevere's actions and decisions affect Launcelot's affinity, and the Poisoned Apple episode brings distrust in the queen, in Launcelot and in Launcelot's friends.

So, Malory's narrative of the Poisoned Apple proves to be more complex than his sources, and he links the Poisoned Apple with previous events to justify Sir Pinel's motive in poisoning Gawain:

> Sir Pyonell hated sir Gawayne bycause of hys kynnesman sir Lamorakes dethe; and therefore, for pure envy and hate, sir Pyonell enpoysonde serrayn appylls for to empoysen sir Gawayne. (*Works*, 613)
>
> Sir Pinel hated Sir Gawain because of his kinsman Sir Lamorak's death; and therefore for pure envy and hate, Sir Pinel poisoned certain apples for to poison Sir Gawain. (*Winchester*, 406)

While his sources did not give a clear reason behind the poisoning, Malory links it to the envy and hate some knights have for each other, and also to the knights avenging their kinsmen's death. Here, Sir Pinel – the knight who put poison in the apples – is Lamorak's cousin and a member of his affinity. Sir Pinel's desire to kill Sir Gawain is due to Gawain being responsible for Lamorak's death. The reason behind Gawain organizing Lamorak's murder is Lamorak being caught in bed with Morgause, Gawain's mother. We see here the tragic outcome of revenge with Gawain killing Lamorak and Pinel killing Patrise. The Round Table appears filled with violence, revenge and struggle for power, of who is going to destroy the others' affinities first. It is also a matter of self-destruction because they all are members of the Round Table, and by killing each other, the knights weaken the fellowship's link. In a never-ending circle of battling and killing each other, the personal conflicts can only end up in total chaos. While the Poisoned Apple is firstly presented as Guinevere's attempt to make sure that her adulterous relationship with Launcelot is not too visible and to counter possible accusations of favoritism towards Launcelot, adultery is no longer the focus at the end of the episode. It instead ends up in a betrayal between knights that are supposed to be united by their status of knights of the Round Table. The Poisoned Apple might bring distrust in Guinevere because she was the one

who gave the poisoned apple to Patrise, but the readers know that Pinel is the one responsible for Patrise's death. What should be remembered of the Poisoned Apple and what is put forward in the *Morte Darthur*, is that knights die because of other knights of the same kingdom, and that the Round Table's unity is weakened by the growing distrust of the knights in each other. The Round Table's unity is further weakened with the following episode: the Knight of the Cart.

In the previous section I have already evoked the "Knight of the Cart" episode, where a knight named Meliagaunt enters the queen's room and accuses Guinevere of adultery when he sees bloodied sheets, blood belonging to a hurt knight:

> When sir Mellyagaunt aspyed that blood, than he demed in her that she was false to the kynge and that some of the wounded knythes had lyene by her all that nyght. (*Works*, 658)
>
> (When Sir Meliagaunt espied that blood, then he judged that she was false to the King, and that some of the wounded knights had lain by her all that night.) (*Winchester*, 455)

By spying on the queen and accusing her of having committed adultery with one of the knights, Meliagaunt also brings distrust among the knights as they all appear as potential suspects. Every knight grows suspicious of the others and it is at that moment that Malory shifts the accusation from Launcelot to Meliagaunt, when Launcelot wonders why Meliagaunt has spied on the queen and was eager to enter her room and open her curtains. I see Malory's addition of the countercharge as a technique to emphasize the importance of the distrust among the knights who bring shame on each other:

> My lorde kynge Arthur hymselff wolde nat have displayed hir curtaynes, and she being within her bed, onles that hit had pleased hym to have layne hym downe by her. And therefore, sir Mellyagaunce, ye have done unworshypfully and shamefully to youreselff. (*Works*, 658)

> (My lord King Arthur himself would not have displayed her curtains, she being within her bed, unless that it had pleased him to have lain him down by her. And therefore, Sir Meliagaunt, ye have done un-worshipfully and shamefully to yourself.) (*Winchester*, 455)

Launcelot's accusation of shameful peeping puts shame on Meliagaunt instead of him and manages to deflect the target to Meliagaunt, whose motives were malicious. Meliagaunt has in fact acted out of jealousy because he has "loved passingly well queen Gwenyver, and so had he done longe and many yerys." (*Works*, 650) (loved passing well queen Guinevere, and so had he done long and many years) and has entered her room to make sure no knight had been in the room before him. Adultery does not appear to be the problem in Malory's version; what matters instead is that knights are ready to accuse and betray each other and start fighting. Once again, similar to what has happened with the Poisoned Apple episode, the Knight of the Cart starts with the adulterous theme (Meliagaunt accusing the queen of adultery), but Launcelot's countercharge in the *Morte Darthur* brings the concern on the masculine rivalries and on how adultery is exploited by other knights. What brings the fellowship down and destroys the Round Table's unity from within are the internal conflicts among knights and their affinities, and the disunity among the knights can be seen in the episode taking place right after the Knight of the Cart story, the "Healing of Sir Urry" episode, an episode I will now examine.

The story of Sir Urry of Hungary is about a wounded knight named Sir Urry who can only be healed by the best knight of the world. All the knights of the Round Table try to heal him. Launcelot succeeds, proving once again that he is the best knight of the kingdom. While previous critics have argued that the Healing of Sir Urry portrays Launcelot positively and portrays a unified Round Table, I suggest that it actually presents the Round Table as disunited and made up of different groups which foreshadows the war to come. There is no mention of adultery in the Healing of Sir Urry but I include this episode nonetheless because it shows how

the *Morte Darthur* not only removes the sexualized content of the French sources but also adds material on the disunity of the Round Table – material that is not present in any of its sources, French or English. In her book *The Manuscript and Meaning of Malory's 'Morte Darthur': Rubrication, Commemoration, Memorialization*, K.S. Whetter states that she is "in complete agreement with Vinaver, D.S. Brewer, Larry D. Benson and C. David Benson in reading the Healing as an episode designed to valorize Launcelot" (Whetter, 177). In addition of showing Launcelot's virtue to heal another knight, this episode is also "the final occasion in the *Morte Darthur* when the Round Table knights are unified in a single mission" (Whetter, 178). Malory gives a catalogue of names representing the knights who try to heal Sir Urry, the ones who fail before Launcelot succeeds. At the same time, this catalogue allows for a recap and overview of all the knights part of the Round Table: two full pages are used to list the knights, which shows that the Round Table still has many members, many individuals who all agree to save Sir Urry. This interpretation would go in line with Whetter's argument that the knights are united. But if we look closer, it appears that the names of the knights are not randomly put one after the other. The knights are presented by faction, by affinity, with first Sir Gawain's relatives and then Sir Launcelot's most loyal knights:

> Than cam in sir Gawayne with hys three synnes, sir Gyngalyn, sir Florence and sir Lovell […], and all they fayled. Than cam in sir Aggravayne, sir Gaherys, and sir Mordred, and the good knyght sir Gareth. […] So cam in the knyghtes of sir Launcelottis kyn […] sir Lyonell, sir Ector de Marys, sir Bors de Ganys, sir Blamoure de Ganys, sir Bleoberys de Gaynys […] and all they fayled. (*Works*, 665)

> Then came in Sir Gawain with his three sons, Sir Gingalin, Sir Florence, and Sir Lovell […] and all they failed. Then came in Sir Agravain, Sir Gaheris, and Sir Mordred, and the good knight Sir Gareth. […] So came in the knights of Sir Lancelot's kin […] Sir

> Lionel, Sir Ector de Maris, Sir Bors de Ganis, Sir Blamor de Ganis, Sir Bleoberis de Ganis […] and all they failed. (*Winchester*, 462)

So, behind what seems to be a united fellowship with the single mission of healing Sir Urry, what previous critics have agreed on, knights are actually divided according to the bonds between individuals within the fellowship. Those bonds are usually blood related: Gawain is presented with his brothers and his sons, Launcelot with his cousin Lionel and with the three brothers from Garis. In Camelot, blood ties and loyalty within a same family seem to remain very important, and we will see in the next chapter that the situation is quite different in Cornwall with members of the same family being enemies. However, the knights' presentation according to their family ties also emphasizes that being part of different groups and different families overpowers being part of the same Round Table order. That is why I see the Healing of Sir Urry as a sign that disunity overcomes an apparent but precarious unity, and while the episode does not mention adultery, by emphasizing on the disunity between knights, the *Morte Darthur* also reduces the importance of Launcelot and Guinevere's adultery.

Elizabeth Archibald, in "Malory's Ideal of Fellowship", explains that there are "small fellowships within the larger Round Table group: not only individual friendships, but also the temporary fellowships formed when knights join together in groups for tournaments, and also the permanent […] fellowships based on kinship and clan loyalties" (Archibald, 316). She suggests that there are "two sides of Arthurian fellowship: the macrocosm of the Round Table, and the microcosm of […] links between individual knights" (Archibald, 318). Using her terminology, I believe that the Healing of Sir Urry shows the two sides of the fellowship: the episode reviews the macrocosm of the Round Table by naming its members belonging to this knightly order, but it also presents the different microcosms, the different clans with the knights

linked to the different superiors[16], hence why Agravaine is part of Gawain's clan and Bors part of Launcelot's. It is also worth pointing out that the story of Sir Urry of Hungary is added by Malory and is not present in any of his sources, which leads me to think that Malory has added this story and the catalogue of knights in order to give a better overview of the rival affinities of knights within the Round Table, especially the ones of Gawain and Launcelot which foreshadows the war to come between them.

Later in the *Morte Darthur*, Malory makes other catalogues of knights as reminders of which knights are loyal to Launcelot (*Works* 699-700). I claim that the catalogues make the Round Table loses its strength because the members are individualized, separated and not united under a same lord. Also, even if the Healing of Sir Urry portrays Launcelot positively because he saves Sir Urry, it also shows the unstable structure of the Round Table and the inequalities between the knights as Launcelot is the best knight and the most powerful because the only one who can heal Sir Urry. What is more, the story of Sir Urry exists because of the jealousy and envy between knights as Sir Urry and his opponent Sir Alpheus "encountred togydirs for very envy" (encountered together for very envy) (*Works*, 663). So, in addition of individualizing and disunifying the knights, the story has another purpose: Malory's addition of the Healing of Sir Urry exposes the knights killing each other out of envy and jealousy.

With the stories of the Poisoned Apple, the Knight of the Cart and the Healing of Sir Urry, we have seen that violence is omnipresent in the political Arthurian order of the Round Table. Violence is linked to power as the knights' goal is to become more powerful by dominating other knights and weakening rival affinities, and power is linked to politics because the political structure of the kingdom is affected depending on which knight gains or loses power. In the *Morte Darthur*'s sources, one of the three episodes does not exist and the other

[16] According to Kenneth Hodges, "superior" refers to the most important individuals of the kingdoms: king Arthur but also the main knights that are Launcelot, Gawain, Lamorak or Tristram.

two focus on the romantic tragedy between Launcelot and Guinevere, when Guinevere is condemned to death and when she is accused of adultery. Violence and revenge were mainly conducted towards the adulterous lovers. But in the *Morte Darthur*, the adulterous relationship between Launcelot and Guinevere is not depicted as a romantic tragedy but as a weakness in the kingdom which allows the knights to take advantage of that weakness. The knights establish their power and their dominance over their fellow knights, and they blame or bring shame onto the adulterous lovers. Indeed, knights are envious and jealous of each other, they are ready to bring shame on each other, ready to fight, poison and kill, and they take advantage of the adulterous relationship between Launcelot and Guinevere to put the blame on them.

Political power has as decisive role in the destruction of the Round Table. It is sometimes used correctly when the knights counsel and help the king, but most often the quest for power is driven by evil thoughts such as envy, revenge or hatred. For example, the unstable kingdom of Camelot will lose what remains of its stability when Launcelot's adulterous relationship with Guinevere is revealed. The violent knight who shames, fights or gets his revenge on other knights seems to be the powerful one because he is the one that has an advantage on his target. Meliagaunt is the one accusing, Pinel is the one poisoning: they are supposed to be in control of the situation. But in the *Morte Darthur*, violence and revenge end up in failure or in death: Pinel wants to poison Gawain but Patrise dies instead, and Meliagaunt is accused of shameful peeping by Launcelot who challenges and kills Meliagaunt. The text presenting the violent and vengeful knight as failing is a way to criticize their behaviors and show that violent and revenge do not lead to victory or success. As we will see now, another knight who shows envy and jealousy (what will ultimately lead him to his death) is Agravaine, king Arthur's nephew. Agravaine has always hated Launcelot because Launcelot is known as the best knight of the realm and has both the king and the queen's favors. Agravaine's hatred of Launcelot is what motivates him to warn Arthur about Launcelot and Guinevere's

relationship and try to catch them in the act, to bring shame on the adulterous lovers in the hope of getting closer to Arthur and thus to power. In the *Morte Darthur*, the strong bond between Launcelot and Guinevere is used by people to attack them and bring disunity among the members of the Round Table: it is because of adultery, a flaw in the power balance of the kingdom, that in Camelot the knights are able to get rid of rivals or able to get their revenge. Adultery in itself is not an issue, but it becomes one when it turns into a major public concern for the whole kingdom and does not remain a personal issue between Launcelot, Guinevere and Arthur.

In Malory's French source the prose *Lancelot,* Arthur is warned three times that Guinevere and Launcelot are engaging in an adulterous relationship. The three warnings are all found in the last part of the prose *Lancelot* which is entitled *La Mort le Roi Artu*, or *Mort Artu*. The first and third warnings are given by Agravaine. While the first two warnings have no direct consequences on the kingdom, the lovers are discovered after the third one, which forces Arthur to take action against them and declare war against Launcelot. In Malory's English source the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur*, only one warning is given to the king, which corresponds to the third warning in the *Mort Artu*. When faced with this difference in his sources, I argue that Malory has chosen to follow his English source because of his desire to emphasize the rivalries among the knights instead of Launcelot and Guinevere's adultery. To prove my point, I will first introduce the first two warnings present in the *Mort Artu* but absent from the *Stanzaic* and the *Morte Darthur* and then discuss the differences between the last warning, common to all three texts.

In the *Mort Artu*, the first warning occurs when a tournament is announced to take place in Winchester. The king and his knights are supposed to joust there, but Launcelot declares that he cannot to go to Winchester because he feels *deshetiez* (ill) (*Mort Artu*, 6). However, Agravaine suspects otherwise. Motivated by envy and jealousy, Agravaine has been spying on

Launcelot with the hope to find something suspicious about Launcelot to report to Arthur. That is how he notices that Launcelot and Guinevere are very close. Agravaine deduces that they are lovers and, in his mind, it is clear that Launcelot has refused to go to Winchester because he is planning to see the queen in secret. He quickly informs Arthur about it:

> Lancelos ainme la reïne de fole amour et la reïne lui. Et por ce qu'il ne pueent mie assembler a leur volenté quant vos i estes, est Lancelot remés, qu'il n'ira au tornoiement de Wincestre. (*Mort Artu*, 6)
>
> (Launcelot loves the queen of passionate love, and she does love him as well. As they cannot be freely together when you are there, Launcelot stayed and said he would not go to the Winchester tournament.)

Contrary to Agravaine's expectations, Arthur does not believe him and refutes the possibility that his best knight is in love with his wife. Disappointed, Agravaine decides to resume his spying of Launcelot and Guinevere and gather more evidence to support his assertion in order to convince Arthur that Launcelot and Guinevere are having an affair. Launcelot ultimately goes to the Winchester tournament, which dismisses all thoughts of an adulterous relationship between Launcelot and Guinevere. This scene marks the first doubts Arthur has of Guinevere's fidelity, doubts that are quickly dispelled, and understandably so because there is no strong evidence yet to confirm Agravaine's claim.

The second warning occurs when Morgan Le Fay, Arthur's half-sister, warns him that Launcelot has been in love with Guinevere since he has become a knight:

> Lancelos ainme la reïne Guenievere des le premerain jor qui il reçut l'ordre de chevalerie, et por l'amour de la reïne, quant il fu nouviaux chevaliers, fist il toutes les proesces qu'il fesoit. (*Mort Artu*, 50)

(Launcelot is in love with the queen since the day he has become a knight, and it is for the love of the queen than he the young knight has accomplished all his feats.)

Here we can see once again that the French text portrays Launcelot as a courtly lover who has done all deeds in order to conquer his lady. In addition of her warning, Morgan reveals to Arthur the existence of paintings that Launcelot has made, paintings depicting Guinevere and acting as evidence of his love for her. Contrary to Agravaine, Morgan adds concrete evidence of Launcelot's special affection towards Guinevere. This is the second time Arthur is warned and doubts grow in his mind. The possibility of the adultery becomes true, and another side of Arthur emerges, one of a man jealous and angry, who thinks of an exemplary *joustise qu'il en sera parlé a touz jorz mes* (punishment which will be talked forever) (*Mort Artu*, 52), equal to the shame brought upon him. Arthur's jealousy is what triggers his desire of revenge against Launcelot and Guinevere, which will ultimately result in him making war against him:

> Bien fust Lancelos asseür que ja si tost ne seroit en son païs qu'il trouveroit la guerre greignour qu'il ne porroit quidier […] ce ne porroit il mie avoir paus entre moi et vous. (*Mort Artu*, 135-136)
>
> (Launcelot was well assured that as soon as he would be back in his country, a more dreadful war that he could imagine would be started against him […] there could never be peace between me and you.)

Throughout the *Mort Artu*, Arthur is guided by his personal feelings and acts for his own benefit just as Agravaine has acted personally based on envy when he spied on Launcelot.

The first two warnings of the French texts are not present in the *Morte Darthur*, an absence that has been studied by previous critics such as John Michael Walsh and E. Talbot Donaldson. Both critics describe Malory's Arthur as a king who is clever and who knows that the discovery of Guinevere and Launcelot's close affinity would damage on the kingdom. In

his article "Malory's Arthur and the Plot of Agravain", Walsh observes that by omitting these two warnings "Malory apparently wants to avoid dealing directly with Arthur" (Walsh, 520) and that "his objection was to the warnings themselves and not merely to certain details about them" (Walsh, 519). He goes on by explaining that "through the omission of the charges of Agravain and Morgan, Malory's Arthur escapes the diminishment in stature that the French king suffers" (Walsh, 521) and that he "gains in stature by comparison with his French prototype" (Walsh, 522). What Walsh argues here is that having only one warning in the *Morte Darthur*, contrary to the *Mort Artu* which has three, means that Arthur does not need to be reminded several times by different people that the relationship between Guinevere and Launcelot is suspicious. In removing the first two warnings, Malory keeps Arthur's knowledge of the situation unknown until the king receives his first and last warning. Unlike Walsh who explains that the omissions allows Arthur to gain in stature when he is faced with his wife's adultery, Donaldson argues in "Malory and the Stanzaic 'Le Morte Darthur'" that Arthur's "silence suddenly appears as the result of […] a deep desire not to have the conflict of loyalties comes to the surface, where he would – with what disastrous consequences he well knew – have to face it" (Donaldson, 470), and Malory chose to follow his English source where poet refused to condemn Launcelot and Guinevere because he did not want to focus on adultery. Building from their interpretations, I suggest that omitting the first two warning also gives more strength to the third warning, when Arthur is later warned once again by Agravaine, and that by doing so, the *Morte Darthur* puts the accent on Agravaine's last warning and his desire to ruin Launcelot's reputation and bring shame upon him and not on his love with Guinevere. I also believe that Agravaine has another motivation behind denouncing Launcelot, which is to destroy Launcelot's powerful position as friend and close counsellor to Arthur and fill in his position. By denouncing Launcelot and proving Arthur that Launcelot is treacherous,

Agravaine's hope is to gain power by forcing Arthur to punish Launcelot, stop trusting him and have trust in himself (Agravaine) instead.

In the *Mort Artu,* when Agravaine warns Arthur a second time, Arthur's third warning overall, his claims are supported by Gareth and Mordred. Arthur's anger is getting stronger and stronger because their adultery, if proven true, is a very personal betrayal from both his wife and his close friend:

> Si mue couleur et devint pales […] est li rois pensis et dolenz et tant a melese qu'il ne set qu'il doie fere ; et toutevoies quant il parole, si dit : "Se vos onques m'amastes, fetes tant que vous les preigniez prouvez ; et se ge n'en praing venchement tel com l'en doit fere de traïteur, ge ne quier jamés porter coronne." (*Mort Artu*, 87)
>
> (He changed colour and became pale […] the king is thinking and mournful and so ill at ease that he does not what to do. However, when he spoke, he said, "If you have ever loved me, do as such as you catch them red-handed; and if I do not take revenge as we should do of a traitor I never want to wear the crown.")

His reaction is the one of a man realizing that he might have been betrayed by the people closest to him, hence why he asks for concrete evidence in order to plan his revenge. This is the third accusation of Guinevere's adultery, adultery committed with Launcelot, a knight he has always trusted before. The first accusation was made without clear evidence, and was dismissed when Launcelot decided to go to the tournament. The second accusation put doubts in Arthur's head, but he somehow did not act on it and still appears surprised by the third warning when he *mue couleur et devint pales […] pensis et dolenz et tant a melese melese* (changed colour and became pale […] thinking and mournful and so ill at ease). It is the third warning adding up that finally makes him want to *les preigniez prouvez* (catch them red-handed) fast.

In the French texts, Guinevere and Launcelot represent a private romantic threat to king Arthur. He appears rather passive and oblivious to what is happening around him because his affection for them prevents him from believing that they could engage in an adulterous relationship. I interpret Arthur's surprise when he is warned about Guinevere and Launcelot's relationship for the third time as a result of him not wanting to accept the truth. In contrast with the *Mort Artu,* Arthur does not seem to be surprised in the English *Stanzaic Morte Artu*. He is calm and asks Agravaine what should be done to prove his accusation that Launcelot and Guinevere are committing adultery:

> "Sir Agravain, so God thee rede,
> What were now thy best counsel,
> For to take him with the deed?
> He is man of such apparail,
> Of him I have full mikel drede." (*Stanzaic*, 1745-1749)
>
> ("Sir Agravaine, as God advises you
> What would now be your best counsel
> To take him in the act?
> He is a man of great accomplishment,
> I am very much afraid of him.")

In the *Stanzaic*, Launcelot's greatness is recognized, and even feared. Because the English source has gotten rid of the first two warnings for unknown reasons, I believe it made Malory want to follow the *Stanzaic* because of his desire to emphasize the rivalries among the knights instead of Launcelot and Guinevere's adultery.

The scene in the *Morte Darthur* is very close to the *Stanzaic* one: there is no such sign of surprise in the reaction of Malory's Arthur, who does not need three warnings but only one. Launcelot's prowess is recognized as well and Arthur wants to take him in the act:

> "He [Launcelot] ys non othir [than a traitor]. But I wolde be lothe to begyn such a thynge but I myght have prevys of hit, for sir Launcelot ys an hardy knight, and all ye know that he ys the beste knygt amonge us all […] and I know no knight that ys able to macch hym. Therefore, and hit be sothe as ye say, I wolde that he were takyn with the dede." (*Works*, 674)
>
> ("He [Launcelot] is none other [than a traitor]; but I would be loath to begin such a thing but I might have proofs of it. For Sir Lancelot is a hardy knight, and all ye know that he is the best knight among us all […] and I know no knight that is able to match him. Therefore, and it be sooth as ye say, I would that he was taken with the deed.") (*Winchester*, 469-470)

The line "I wolde be lothe to begyn such a thynge but I myght have prevys of hit" is particularly interesting for Arthur's analysis because it reveals that he knows that Launcelot might be a traitor, and also partly reveals why he did not say anything so far: because he likes Launcelot, recognizes his greatness and is thus reluctant to confront him. It also reveals that Arthur favors the public good, what is good for the realm: even if he has doubts, he waits for Launcelot to be caught red-handed, which illustrates Arthur's wisdom and not his personal desire for revenge. Malory's line of conduct about downplaying sexual relationships affects his characters, and Arthur does not emphasize the sexual side of Launcelot and Guinevere's love.

Indeed, contrary to his French counterpart, Malory's Arthur is patient, he does not act without reason, he "has been able to sink his masculine pride in the concern for the unity of the

fellowship" (Walsh, 524). Walsh interprets Malory's motives for altering Arthur's reaction as follows:

> Instead of the vacillating French king, who swings back and forth between angry suspicion and easy reassurance, we get a figure who has not been duped at all by Lancelot and Guinevere, but rather one who has been strong enough to forego revenge for as long as the actual practice of the adultery poses less of a threat to the unity of the court than his exposing and punishing the lovers would do. (Walsh, 531)

Arthur refusing to reveal the adultery because he wishes to avoid a public scandal aligns with my argument that the *Morte Darthur* focuses on adultery as a political threat rather than as a romantic threat. Even if the sinful relationship between Launcelot and Guinevere represents a threat to his marriage, what matters most for Arthur is the political aspect, and punishing them would represent a greater threat for the stability of the realm: public good is favored over private good. But because Agravaine warns Arthur in front of the whole court, it forces Arthur to take action against Launcelot and Guinevere and set up a plan to catch them. In the *Morte Darthur*, one warning is enough to create a crisis, and Agravaine's warning thus appears even more destructive for the realm than it was in its French source. We will see that Arthur is not able to control his anger when the threat is political and not romantic, which follows my argument that Malory's changes from his French sources bring a new emphasis on the fellowship and on politics rather than on adultery and on courtly love. What has been removed by Malory is Arthur's jealousy and his personal desire for revenge, and with that the focus on courtly love with Launcelot's feelings toward Guinevere.

I have established that in the *Morte Darthur*, adultery is used to emphasize the internal conflicts and the factional rivalries among the knights. It is no longer used romantically with explicit physical intercourse as in the French source did. Relationships among knights being more harmful than Launcelot and Guinevere's adulterous relationship is also corroborated by

some of Malory's comments. At the end of the Knight of the Cart episode, Malory is quick to review the original French story and it appears clear that Malory abridges the French sources and goes to the destruction of the Round Table and Arthur's death because it has a bigger interest and does not focus on courtly love:

> And, as the Freynshe booke sayth, he ded […] more than forty batayles. And bycause I have loste the very mater of Shevalere de Charyot I departe frome the tale of sir Launcelot; and here I go unto the morte Arthur, and that caused sir Aggravayne. (*Works*, 669)
>
> (And as the French book saith, he did […] more than forty battles. And because I have lost the very matter of le Chevalier du Chariot, I depart from the tale of Sir Lancelot and here I go unto the morte Arthur, and that caused Sir Agravain.) (*Winchester*, 467).

Malory writing "and that caused sir Aggravayne" (that Sir Agravaine caused the death of Arthur) suggests that he condemns Agravaine for seeking the truth about Launcelot and Guinevere's relationship and reveal to the court what was hidden and controllable. Agravaine publicly accusing the queen of adultery and him trying to bring shame on Launcelot is the cause of Arthur's obligation to take action against his wife and his best knight. Malory's comment in the opening of the last book on Arthur's death puts the blame on Agravaine and Mordred and reaffirms that the destruction of the kingdom is directly linked to the lack of loyalty and trust among knights and due to Agravaine and Mordred's hatred towards Launcelot and Guinevere:

> The worlde was destroyed and slayne. And all was longe upon two unhappy knyghtis whych were named sir Aggravayne and sir Mordred […] For thys sir Aggravayne and sir Mordred had ever a prevy hate unto the queen, dame Gwenyver, and to sir Launcelot; and dayly and nyghtly they ever wacched upon sir Launcelot. (*Works*, 673)

> (The world was destroyed and slain. And all was on account of two unhappy knights which were named Sir Agravain and Sir Mordred […] for this Sir Agravain and Sir Mordred had ever a privy hate unto the queen, Dame Guenivere, and to Sir Launcelot. And daily and nightly they ever watched upon Sir Lancelot.) (*Winchester,* 468)

According to Malory, the destruction of the kingdom happens because of the lack of loyalty and trust among knights as Agravaine and Mordred hate Launcelot and Guinevere, and less linked to the actual adultery. The word "all" is particularly significant as they indicate that the two knights share the blame. In revealing the relationship between Guinevere and Launcelot to the court, Agravaine makes the public scandal erupt and leads the Round Table to its end, and in killing Arthur, Mordred officially puts an end to the Round Table. In "Adultery in Malory's 'Le Morte d'Arthur'", Beverly Kennedy claims that "by accusing Arthur's queen of adultery in open court […] the king's nephew created an irresolvable political crisis, which led ultimately to war, civil war and the death of Arthur. Once Mordred and Aggravain had made that accusation, the only way to resolve the political crisis in the court was to prove its truth or falsity" (Kennedy, 81). I maintain that the political crisis Beverly evokes in her article is due to different factions fighting within the Round Table and to the maliciousness of the knights themselves to get rid of other knights.

Malory's strategy of downplaying the romantic to emphasize the political culminates when Launcelot is found in the queen's room by other knights following Agravaine's warning to Arthur. By looking at the French and the English sources, I will show that Malory followed once again his English source because it puts a higher concern on the political consequences than on the romantic ones. In the *Mort Artu*, the discovery of the adulterous relationship between Launcelot and Guinevere is what is most important. Launcelot manages to escape the queen's room after killing one knight named Tanaguin who was standing in his way. Launcelot accuses them of being *mauves coarz* (pathetic cowards) (*Mort Artu,* 92) and dares them to come

forward and fight him. Because the others knights know that Launcelot is better than them, and also because they see Tanaguin lying dead on the floor, they are scared and refuse to fight Launcelot, letting him escape:

> Si n'i ot celui qui ne se traie arrieres en tel manière que l'entree remest toute vuide […] et li fet voie touz li plus hardiz. (*Mort Artu*, 93)
>
> (They stepped back so that the doorway was empty, even the more courageous ones moved aside.)

In the French source, the death of a knight is merely a minor event which is no longer mentioned afterwards. This scene does not have a crucial impact on the fellowship itself, the physical aspect of the adulterous relationship between Launcelot and Guinevere remains the central issue. However, in the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur*, Launcelot is found in Guinevere's room by many knights. The English poet makes Launcelot kill not only one knight but all of them except Mordred. Unlike Malory's French source, Agravaine is killed by Launcelot in the *Stanzaic*: "Launcelot then smote […] Sir Agravain" (Launcelot then killed […] Sir Agravain) (*Stanzaic*, 1856-1858).

In the *Morte Darthur*, Malory appears to closely follow the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur*'s story and prefers it to its French source. I believe he chose his English source because the death of many knights suited his agenda of reducing the importance of adultery and focusing on the political consequences the murders have on the Round Table. Launcelot kills all the knights of the Round Table who are standing in his way and only Mordred manages to escape:

> And anone at the first stroke he slew sir Aggravayne, and anone aftir twelve of hys felowys […] there was none of the twelve knyghtes myght stoned sir Launcelot one buffet. (*Works*, 678)

> (And anon at the first stroke he slew Sir Agravain, and anon after twelve of his fellows […] there was none of the twelve knights might withstand from sir Lancelot one buffet.) (*Winchester*, 472)

While the discovery of the adulterous relationship between Launcelot and Guinevere is the point of focus in the French book and the death of Tanaguin is a minor event, Malory has Launcelot follow the *Stanzaic* and kill a dozen of knights of the Round Table including Agravaine.

Also, Malory gives extenuating circumstances to Launcelot: even if he did not want to fight the knights, Launcelot had to kill them in order to save his own life. Launcelot does not provoke the knights by telling them they are cowards. It is the knights who provoke Launcelot by telling him that he is a "traytour" (traitor) and that he should "com oute of the quenys chambir" (come out of the queen's chamber) (*Works*, 676). In the French source, it is Launcelot who attacks Tanaguin. In the *Morte Darthur*, Launcelot is told by the knights that they will not kill him if he opens the door, but he is nonetheless attacked by a knight named Sir Colgrevance when he does open it. After being tricked, Launcelot still does not want to fight and asks for the knights to leave. Launcelot is not aggressive like the Launcelot of the French source. Instead, he would like to explain that he "cam to the quene for no maner of male engyne" (came to the queen for no manner of mal engine[17]) (*Works*, 677). However, because the knights do not want to leave and want to fight him, Launcelot ultimately engages in the fight and kills the knights. By explicitly expressing Launcelot's reluctance to fight, Malory illustrates the Launcelot's goodness compared to the other knights who are ready to fight and kill him. Unfortunately, because he has no other choice if he wants to survive, Launcelot kills many knights and Arthur's Round Table finds itself weakened by the loss of advisors such as

[17] *Male engyne* or *mal engine*, from Anglo-Norman and French *mal engine*, from *mal* ("bad", "evil") + *engin* ("ruse", "trickery") meaning bad intention, evil purpose.

Agravaine. As we shall see now with the study of Arthur's reaction and attitude when he learns that twelve of his knights have been killed, I assert that the knights' deaths appear more important to Arthur than Agravaine's warning about Launcelot and Guinevere's adultery. Arthur's anger over the death of his knights is what leads him to declare war against Launcelot and assert his power over his former friend and most valuable knight.

When Malory follows his English source and make Launcelot kill a dozen knights, he chose to focus on the fellowship instead of the adulterous relationship. While Arthur has managed to keep his personal feelings aside when Agravaine has warned him about Launcelot and Guinevere's relationship, he cannot keep his calm anymore when his knights are killed by Launcelot. As revenge, Arthur wants Launcelot to have a shameful death:

> "If I may gete sir Launcelot, wyte you well he shall have as shamefull a dethe." (Works, 683).
>
> ("If I may get Sir Lancelot, wit you well he shall have as shameful a death.") (Winchester, 479)

Before, punishing Launcelot and Guinevere before would have represented a considerable threat for the Round Table because it would have accentuated the tensions between the different affinities and factions among the knights. But now many knights have been murdered and Arthur cannot let the slaughter go unpunished. Guinevere is sentenced to death without trial and like in the French source, she is condemned to be burned alive at the stake. But the condemnation is presented differently. In the French *Mort Artu,* there is a clear correlation between Guinevere's lack of loyalty to her husband and her condemnation:

> Li rois commande a ses sergenz qu'il feïssent [..] un feu grant et merveillex, ou la reïne sera mise ; car autrement ne doit reïne morir qui desloiauté fet. (*Mort Artu,* 97)

(The king orders his sergeants to erect […] a large and splendid stake where the queen is to be thrown into. This is no other punishment reserved to a disloyal queen.)

The *desloiauté* (disloyalty) of the queen towards Arthur, her adultery with Launcelot, is what brings her to be condemned by the Round Table consisting of Arthur and the other knights including Mordred, Gaheris and Agravaine. In the *Mort Artu*, adultery at very much at the center of the plot, and Launcelot and Guinevere are romantic threats for Arthur. The accent is not put on Guinevere's loyalty to her lover Launcelot, but on her disloyalty to her husband the king. She is condemned because of her adulterous relationship: adultery is what triggers Arthur's decision to burn her alive.

In the *Morte Darthur*, Arthur is guided by his personal feelings but not for same reason as the Arthur of the French source: he condemns his wife to death because of Launcelot's slaughter and the political impact their relationship has on the realm, not because of their romantic attachment. As I have stated in the introduction of the chapter, politics in the *Morte Darthur* have taken over romance and adultery, and contrary to the *Mort Artu*, it is the harm done against the knights – not only the personal harm done to Arthur – which acts as the decisive factor in Guinevere's condemnation:

Bycause sir Mordred was ascaped sore wounded, and the dethe of thirteen knyghtes of the Rounde Table, thes previs and experyenses caused kynge Arthure to commaunde the quene to the fyre and there to be brente. (*Works*, 682)

(Because Sir Mordred was escaped sore wounded, and the death of thirteen knights of the Round Table, these proofs and experiences caused King Arthur to command to Queen to the fire, and there to be burned.) (*Winchester*, 478)

Malory does not mention adultery in that sentence, and I believe that it is because he is far more concerned by the weakening of his "noble felyship" (noble fellowship), which he believes is

"brokyn for ever" (broken forever) (*Works*, 682). For Arthur, fellowship prevails over romance and the love he has for his knights is superior to the love he has for his wife, and he is ready to reluctantly sacrifice her if it means getting his revenge. I use the word "reluctantly" because it is said that the killing of the knights "caused" (*Works*, 682) Arthur to condemn Guinevere, which suggests than Arthur has no other choice but to find a way to have his knights' deaths avenged. When Arthur is left to contemplate the destruction of the Round Table, he can only avenge them by punishing Guinevere since Launcelot has escaped. Arthur's prime reason to punish Guinevere is not because of her adulterous and romantic relationship with Launcelot, but because the adulterous relationship has resulted in his knights' deaths. Arthur must then restore the power balance of the kingdom by putting an end to the political threats that Launcelot and Guinevere have become.

In the *Mort Artu*, Arthur says that *il amoit la roïne de si grant amour* (he loved the queen so much) (*Mort Artu*, 129). We have here proof of Arthur's love feelings towards Guinevere with the words *amoit* (loved) and *amour* (love). This love from Arthur to Guinevere is not present in the *Morte Darthur*, and I suggest that Arthur's feelings for his queen being removed illustrates Malory's shift of focus from adultery and romance in the French sources to the fellowship and politics instead:

> "And much more I am soryar for my good knyghtes losse than for the losse of my fayre quene; for quenys I myght have inow, but such a felyship of good knyghtes shall never be togydirs in no company." (*Works*, 685)
>
> ("And much more am I sorrier for my good knights' loss than for the loss of my fair queen; for queens I might have enough, but such a fellowship of good knights shall never be together in no company.") (*Winchester*, 482)

Arthur praises the uniqueness of the Round Table while Guinevere is seen as one out of many women that he could have married. In the moral Arthurian universe and in Arthur's mind, Guinevere can be replaced while the Round Table and the knights forming it cannot. One could argue that the knights can always be replaced, and that another form of Round Table would be created instead. This replacement would mean the political failure of Arthur in his fellowship, in a stable order he created with powerful knights such as Launcelot, Gawain or Mordred. Ideally, the knights are supposed to ensure peace of the kingdom but them fighting against each other and Arthur's failure to keep his knights united, to keep control over them, marks the end of peace and the start of war. Also, more importantly, arguing that another form of Round Table can be created goes against the textual evidence suggesting Malory's view that the Round Table is unique and cannot be recreated, hence why I discard this possibility. In "The Tale of the Death of Arthur: Catastrophe and Resolution", Wilfred L. Guerin comments that "the loss of that Round Table […] constitutes the tragedy of Arthur. More than a symbol for him, the society is the practical means of governing his empire; it provides good fellowship; it is the source of great pride, and personal satisfaction" and Arthur has the "tragic self-knowledge" that his fellowship is destroyed (Guerin, 263). This idea of the fellowship being irreplaceable is central in the *Morte Darthur*: events such as the killings of his knights by Launcelot, the destruction of the Round Table from within, appear far more harmful to Arthur's reign than the mutual affinity of his wife and his best knight, harmless to the realm until the accusations made against them by Agravaine and Meliagaunt.

Because Launcelot has killed his knights, and not because he is his wife's adulterous lover, Arthur still wishes to get his revenge and destroy Launcelot. Arthur is motivated by anger and he does not think nor act clearly anymore:

> "I shall never have reste of hym tyll I have destroyed sir Launcelottys kynne and hymselff bothe, othir ellis he to destroy me." (*Works*, 685)

("I shall never have rest of him till I have destroyed Sir Lancelot's kin and himself both, or else he to destroy me.") (*Winchester*, 481)

Arthur does not act clearly because he has lost his knights who were also his advisors, they are dead or have left: Agravaine has been killed by Launcelot, and Mordred has escaped the slaughter and is wounded. The king cannot rely on them for political advice anymore: Arthur's kingship is weakened and it makes Arthur acts as the sole decider of Guinevere's fate unlike the French Arthur who met and talked with his knights before taking a decision. Arthur is losing control of his kingdom and is unable to maintain the powerful rivalries of the Round Table in peace. Arthur's control of the kingdom is totally lost when more than forty other knights are killed by Launcelot and the knights who are members of his affinity when they rescue Guinevere, who is about to be burned. A list of the individuals killed by Launcelot and his men is given, which adds to the feeling or loss and shows that the Round Table is wiped out of its members:

> There were they slayne, full many a noble knyght. For there was slayne sir Bellyas le Orgulus, sir Segwarides, sir Gryffet, sir Braundyles, sir Agglovale, sir Tor […] sir Gaherys and sir Gareth. (*Works*, 684)
>
> (There were they slain, full many a noble knight: for there was slain Sir Belliance le Orgulous, Sir Segwarides, Sir Griflet, Sir Brandiles, Sir Agloval, Sir Tor […] Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth.) (*Winchester*, 480)

One last time, the adulterous story of Launcelot and Guinevere is used politically: Launcelot's loyal love for Guinevere which makes him rescue her results in the death of many knights including two of Gawain's brothers, and makes Gawain and Arthur start a war against

Launcelot. In this final war between members of the Round Table, both Gawain and Arthur die[18], which puts an official end to Arthur's reign.

In this chapter I have discussed how Malory has altered his sources to make the *Morte Darthur* more about politics than about romance and to transform Launcelot and Guinevere's adultery as a political threat and no longer a sexual one. A symbol of their chastity is that the risk of Guinevere having a child with Launcelot is never exposed as a threat in the *Morte Darthur*, which implies that there is no risk because they are not engaging in sexual relationships. Compared the scene of the prose *Lancelot*, The Poisoned Apple episode has gained a political dimension in the *Morte Darthur* with the changes of names and the addition of Sir Pinel's motive. Launcelot's countercharge against Meliagaunt and reduction of the courtly Knight of the Cart story illustrate the conflicts between knights taking over the adulterous matter. Malory removes the first two warnings given to Arthur to strengthen the third one, shifting its concern from romantic to political. Malory also removes the love Arthur has for Guinevere in the French *Mort Artu* and only focuses on Arthur's love for his knights and his fellowship. The English *Stanzaic* where twelve nights are killed is preferred to the French *Mort Artu* one where only one knight dies, which makes the political consequences of the slaughter greater than the romantic ones. Malory alters, removes and also adds from his source, with the addition of Healing of Sir Urry increasing the focus on political rivalries. In the *Morte Darthur*, Launcelot and Guinevere's relationship is used by others and brought into the bigger political scheme – centered on diverging loyalties and on betrayals – which leads to the collapse of the Round Table. There is no stability and no unity in the kingdom which is made of a multitude of rival fellowships existing within the order of the Round Table. Malory's work is a

[18] Arthur is killed by his own son Mordred who takes advantage of the feud between Arthur and Launcelot to attack Camelot, self-proclaims king of Camelot, and kills his father.

tale of violence with knights motivated by revenge, envy, jealousy, and quest for power only leading to chaos and death, justifying the title[19] given by Malory's publisher William Caxton.

[19] Malory's original title was *The Hoole Book of Kyng Arthur and of His Noble Knyghtes of the Rounde Table* (The Whole Book of King Arthur and of His Noble Knights of the Round Table) but it was changed by Malory's publisher after his death into *Le Morte Darthur* (The Death of Arthur).

Chapter 2

Cornwall: the self-destruction of a kingdom due to the masculine show of power of a treacherous king

In the previous chapter, we have seen that there is little stability or unity in the kingdom of Camelot, and that in the *Morte Darthur* the adulterous relationship between Launcelot and Guinevere is used for a greater political purpose. The knights of the Round Table are disloyal, and motivated by revenge, envy, and jealousy, and their violent quest to gain power only leading to chaos and death. In this chapter, we will see that in Cornwall, disloyalty exists within a same family, the royal family or Cornwall.

Less academic work has been done on the analysis of the kingdom of Cornwall than on main kingdom of Camelot, and most of the scholars who have studied Tristram, Isolde and Mark have compared or differentiated Tristram with Launcelot, Isolde with Guinevere, Mark with Arthur, and even Camelot and Cornwall. Tristram is said to be "Lancelot's alter-ego" (Schueler, 55) and Tristram's story "parallels Mark's court in Cornwall with Arthur's court at Camelot, establishing Mark as a dark doppelgänger for Arthur" (Hanks, 21). Taking on the existing work that has been done on the Cornish characters, I will first present the two major threats for Tristram and Isolde: Andret and Mark, respectively Tristram's cousin and uncle, and I will then show how hatred and jealousy go beyond the adulterous lovers and affect the whole kingdom when Mark kills his brother and his nephews.

In the prose *Tristan*, the romantic adulterous relationship between Tristram and Isolde remains the central issue throughout the story, and the plot is built around adultery. In the *Morte Darthur* however, the story starts with the adulterous relationships of Tristram and Lady Segwarides, and then of Tristram and Isolde, but politics get involved when knights are killed in the process and the *Morte Darthur* presents opposite forces within the same royal family,

with Mark and some of his nephews on one side and Mark's brother and other nephews including Tristram on the other. Adultery is the first step in the larger scheme of masculine conflicts where men are driven by jealousy, and where the desire to gain or maintain power are stronger than any blood ties or loyalties. Men taking advantage of the adulterous relationship between Tristram and Isolde to express their evil thoughts is the first step towards political destruction. By the end of the chapter, it will become apparent that the kingdom of Cornwall has lost many of its most powerful members including Tristram because of Andret's desire to destroy his cousin and Mark's jealousy towards his own family members as well as his desire to assert his political power, which brings chaos in his kingdom and leads to his own death. Adultery thus plays a role in the political intrigue; it serves to trigger the masculine disloyalties.

To illustrate how members of Tristram's family are disloyal, motivated by envy, jealousy and political power and use Tristram's adulterous relationship with Isolde, I first examine his cousin Andret, whose only purpose seems to reveal Tristram and Isolde's adultery. In the *Morte Darthur*, the only pieces of information that seem relevant to know about Andret are his blood relation to Tristram and his hatred towards him. Andret is neither a valiant Cornish knight nor despised in all the kingdom: he has no distinctive personal character trait and is only seen as Tristram's cousin. Andret being only known because of his more popular and powerful cousin Tristram makes him jealous of Tristram and motivates his decision to bring Tristram down when the first opportunity comes along. This opportunity happens when Andret catches Tristram and Isolde secretly talking "in a wyndowe" (at a window) (*Works*, 267) and he deduces that they are lovers. From that point on, Andret will use Tristram's adulterous relationship with Isolde against them. Indeed, with Tristram and Isolde's love no longer unknown to Andret, he finally has a motive to go against his cousin, and his jealousy makes him "lay in a [watche to] wayte betwyxte sir Trystrames and La Beale Isode to take hym and devoure hym" (lay in wait between Sir Tristram and La Belle Isode for to take him and devour him) (*Works*, 267). Andret

informs Mark about what he has seen, and Mark calls Tristram a "traytowre" (traitor) (*Works*, 267). We will see later in the chapter that Tristram and Isolde's adulterous relationship gives a valid reason for Mark to get rid of Tristram, and we will also see how adultery plays a role in Mark's destruction of his own kingdom. After informing the king, Andret's motivation to catch the lovers together grows stronger:

> Sir Andret, his cosyn, wacched hym nyght by nyght for to take hym with La Beale Isode. (*Works*, 270)
>
> (Sir Andret, his cousin, watched him night by night for to catch him with La Belle Isode.) (*Winchester*, 204)

"Nyght by nyght" (night by night) illustrates well Andret's determination to have his cousin's relationship with the queen exposed: he is ready to spend all his nights watching for anything that could result in him trapping Tristram and Isolde together. So, like in Camelot, adultery is a weakness in the kingdom of Cornwall which allows the knights to take advantage of it in order to fulfil their owns agendas.

Andret in the *Morte Darthur* resembles Andret of the prose *Tristan* where he was already known as Tristram's cousin who tried to find evidence of the lovers' adultery. For example, at some point in the prose *Tristan*, Andret goes to Isolde's room and puts scythes around Isolde's bed in order to catch the lovers. Later, Tristram goes in Isolde's bed and cuts himself with one of the scythes which stains Isolde's sheet:

> Quant Tristranz sot que Audrez fu endormiz, il se leva et ala au lit la roïne, et trova les fauz d'où l'une le feri si durement qu'il li fist plaie grant et parfonde en la jambe, si qu'il saine durement. Mes de ce ne se prist il garde, com cil qui estait desiranz et chauz et son delit faire, si se coche avec la roïne. (*Tristan II*, 134)

(When Tristram was sure that Andret was sleeping, he stood up and went to the queen's bed where the scythes were, one of them cutting him so severely that it wounded him in the leg, so much that he bled a lot. But he did not took notice of that, as he was full of desire and eager to commit his crime, to sleep with the queen.)

In this scene, adultery is the primary concern. *Mes* (but) suggests that adultery is more important, is stronger than Andret's trap: even though Tristram hurts himself, he does not realize because he only thinks about having sex with Isolde. Adultery is described as a *delit* (crime) committed by Tristram, suggesting that physical adultery is perceived as criminal. Also, since Tristram only goes to Isolde's room when he *sot que Audrez fu endormiz* (was sure that Andret was sleeping) the prose *Tristan* shows that Tristram knows about Andret trying to catch him and Isolde, and that both knights exhibit deceitful behavior: Andret by putting scythes and Tristram by hiding his affair. Furthermore, since blood is found in the queen's bed, the episode of the scythes brings guilt on Isolde's adultery with one of the men of the kingdom and is used against them because Mark realizes that the queen is unfaithful to him. All these pieces of evidence focus on the bad side of Tristram and Isolde's relationship: sexual, criminal, and deceiving. In the *Morte Darthur*, the scythe episode does not exist and has been removed by Malory. Its removal prevents an emphasis on the sexual side of adultery, and it also prevents adultery and the adulterous lovers from being presented in a bad light, which would go against the *Morte Darthur*'s overall presentation of the adulterous lovers. Indeed, as a consequence of Malory's removal, adultery is not presented as badly as in the prose *Tristan*: what should be perceived as criminal instead of adultery is the knights' extreme jealousy and their absence of remorse in wishing the lovers' demise, which leads to the destruction of the political balance of the kingdom.

Contrary to the scythe scene, Malory has kept another passage of the prose *Tristan* which does not have its focus on sexual adultery but on Tristram killing one knight in his escape

from Isolde's room, a scene following more Malory's textual agenda of adultery's consequences resulting in political chaos. In the prose *Tristan*'s passage, Andret "mist en la chambre […] vint chevaliers toz armez qui tuit haoient Tristan mortelment" (Andret had twenty armed knights, who all deeply hated Tristram, in the room next door) (*Tristan* II, 136). Tristram, warned by Isolde's maid servant Brangain, manages to escape the room but kills one knight who was standing in his way. Tristram being caught in Isolde's room and escaping it publicly reveals their adultery to the twenty knights. Mark, now convinced that Tristram and Isolde are engaging in an affair. With Mark aware of the liaison, Andret has succeeded in his mission to bring shame onto Tristram: even though one knight is killed, adultery remains very the central point of the story in the prose *Tristan*.

In order to align with his presentation of adultery in the *Morte Darthur* – not in focus and used for one's own ends (out of jealousy, or to bring political destruction) – Malory keeps the scene but alters it in order to downplay adultery and emphasize the political loss. In the *Morte Darthur*, unlike the prose *Tristan*, Tristram does not escape Isolde's room but is captured by Andret and his men:

> Sir Andret gate unto hym twelve knyghtis, and at mydnyght he sette upon sir Trystrames secretly and suddenly. And there sir Trystramys was […] bounde hande and foote and kepte tyll day. (*Works,* 270-271)
>
> (Sir Andret got unto him twelve knights, and at midnight he set upon Sir Tristram secretly and suddenly; and there Sir Tristram was […] bound hand and foot and kept till day.) (*Winchester,* 204)

From the prose *Tristan* to the *Morte Darthur*, Tristram's behaviour has changed: while him escaping in the French source was also an admission of his guilt, the *Morte Darthur* positions Andret as the one who should be guilty because he acts "secretly" and "suddenly" when

Tristram does not expect it. Tristram does not expect because in the *Morte Darthur* he does not know that Andret is trying to catch him with Isolde. This is another difference compared to the prose *Tristan* where Tristram is aware of it and waits for Andret to fall asleep in order to go in Isolde's room. So, through his changes, Malory has shifted the blame from adultery and the adulterous lovers to the violent conflicts between men represented by Andret's sudden capture of an unarmed Tristram and the loss of many Cornish knights.

Compared to what is found in its French source, another detail in the *Morte Darthur* downplays adultery and focuses of the self-destruction of Cornwall by its own people: the number of knights killed by Tristram changes from one in the prose Tristan to ten in the *Morte Darthur*. Indeed, whereas Tristram only killed one knight in the prose *Tristan*, Tristram manages to unbind his hands, overpower Andret and kill ten knights:

> He unwrayste his hondis. […] And than he smote sir Andret, that he felle downe to the erthe, and so he fought that he kylde ten knyghtys. (*Works*, 271)
>
> (He unwrast [unfastened] his hands. […] And then he smote Sir Andret that he fell down to the earth; and so he fought that he killed ten knights.) (*Winchester*, 205)

Malory accentuating the knights' deaths and removing the scythes scene echoes his treatment of Launcelot and Guinevere's adultery when Agravaine traps Launcelot in Guinevere's room. In the previous chapter, I have argued that Malory followed his English source when Launcelot kills twelve knights on his way out of the room (and not his French sources in which only one knight is killed) because Malory wanted to reduce the importance of adultery and focused on the political consequences the murders had instead. Andret and Agravaine's behaviors are similar, they both want to bring shame publicly on the lovers and revealing the adulterous relationships to their king. Both succeed because they manage to catch Tristram and Launcelot in the queens' room, but their actions have negative political consequences on the kingdoms:

twelve knights die in Camelot and ten die in Cornwall (and Andret's success is short-lived as he will end up being killed just like Agravaine). Once again, while the prose *Tristan* concentrates on the adulterous matter, the political outcome of Andret's action is preferred by Malory to the romantic one.

In the "Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones", Malory removes scenes which evoke the adulterous situation. Following my line of argument in this thesis, Malory does not remove it because he condemns adultery but because he wishes to emphasize how adultery is used to bring political chaos in a kingdom. This shift from romantic to politics is comparable to what is done in the story between Launcelot and Guinevere, and like in Camelot, knights are motivated by revenge, envy, jealousy, and quest for power in Cornwall. In order to illustrate these destructive motivations, Malory adds from his source Andret's desire to take Tristram's lands in order to gain political power and become king of Lyones:

> Sir Andred that was cousin unto sir Trystram made a lady that was hys paramour to sey and to noyse hit that she was with sir Trystramys or ever he dyed. And thys tale she brought unto kynge Markis house, that she buryed hym by a well, and that or he dyed he besought kynge Marke to make hys cousin, sir Andred, kynge of the contrey of Lyonas, of the which sir Trystramys was lorde of. And all thys ded sir Andred bycause he wolde have had sir Trystramys londis. (*Works*, 306)
>
> (Sir Andret, that was cousin unto Sir Tristram, made a lady that was his paramour to say and to noise it that she was with Sir Tristram before he died. And this tale she brought unto King Mark's court, that she buried him by a well, and that before he died, he besought King Mark to make his cousin Sir Andret king of the country of Lyonesse, of the which Sir Tristram was lord of. And all this did Sir Andret because he would have had Sir Tristram's lands.) (*Winchester*, 214)

Malory gives a political reason behind Andret's plan in addition to his wish to reveal his cousin's adultery. All along, Andret has been envious and jealous of Tristram, who is lord of Lyones. Andret makes his lady falsely announce Tristram's death. She also reveals Tristram's wish to have Andret as the new king of Lyones. Of course, this is only a false rumour but this political move by Andret to take Tristram's place reveals bigger issues: disloyalty within a same family and the willingness by some members to assert their power over other members. Andret has been disloyal to Tristram, has wanted to shame him, have him dead and be king instead, but he lacked the power to do so and could only do it through dishonest trickeries: by using Tristram and Isolde's adulterous relationship and by entering the queen's room without warning. After the false rumour of Tristram's death, Andret is never mentioned again until we learn that he helped king Mark to assassinate Tristram, and that he was killed shortly after; which supports my claim that Andret's main purpose in the *Morte Darthur* is to politicize adultery, to bring it from a private issue to a public issue. By making the adultery public to the whole kingdom of Cornwall, Andret has also created a rational motive for Mark to go against the lovers, a motive Mark has long hoped to justify his hatred of Tristram.

Except from Tristram and Isolde, the third most studied figure of the kingdom of Cornwall is Mark, who is recognized in the Arthurian world as "the moste cowarde and the vylaunste kynge and knight that is now lyvynge" (the most coward and the villain king and knight that is now living) (*Works*, 376). Previous critics have often put Mark in relation to either Arthur, as both men are kings, or Tristram who is the other major male character of the kingdom. Robert Schueler and Charles Moorman agree that Malory "by altering his sources […] blackened the character of King Mark" (Schueler, 54). Malory "blackens Mark" by making him appear as a "cowardly, treacherous villain" (Moorman, 173), even more so than his French source. In "Adultery in Malory's 'Le Morte d'Arthur'", Kennedy comments on a difference between in the prose *Tristan* and the *Morte Darthur*:

> The most dramatic proof of this [Tristram's] loyalty is no doubt Malory's omission of the bed-substitution plot. Whereas in the French book Isode's maid, Brangaine, is obliged to take her mistress's place in King Mark's bed on the wedding night, in Malory's version there is no need for such sacrifice, because Isode is still a virgin. (Kennedy, 68)

This "bed-subsitution plot" Kennedy is talking about takes place in the prose Tristan because Tristram and Isolde have consummated their relationship while on their way back to Cornwall. Scared that Mark will discover the truth, the virgin Brangain replaces her lady Isolde:

> Yselt se relieve dou lit, et Brangain se met en son leu. Li rois la prent et se deduist o li, et la troeve pucele. Et quant il a assez joé tant com li plot, il se retret un po ensus de li, et Brangain s'in ist maintenant, et Yselt se met arrieres ou lit. Et Brangain se vest et apareille et se part de la chambre. (*Tristan II*, 93)
>
> (Isolde gets out of bed, and Brangain takes her spot. The king takes her and takes pleasure in bed, and finds her a virgin. And when he has had enough enjoyment, he goes to the side of the bed, and Brangain gets out of the bed, and Isolde comes back in it. And Brangain puts her clothes on and leaves the bedroom.)

In the prose *Tristan*, Tristram and Isolde are lying to Mark; they lack loyalty and trick him into believing that he is in bed with Isolde. By choosing not to use this substitution in his work, Malory removes Tristram and Isolde's plot against the king. Because the lovers never plotted against Mark in the *Morte Darthur*, Mark's behavior appears to be more unfair than in the French source where it could be argued that trickery in the kingdom of Cornwall comes from both sides. In the *Morte Darthur*, Tristram is loyal to Mark: he accepts to bring Isolde to his uncle and he does not have evil thoughts afterwards nor consume the relationship on the boat. Mark does not show loyalty towards Tristram and wants to see him dead. The attacks being

one-sided and always coming from Mark makes him worse than his French counterpart. It indeed blackens him.

Mark's negative characteristics are not new as in the prose *Tristan* it is said that Mark hates Tristram and *vodroit il trover achoison vers li qu'il le poïst destruire ou giter hors de sa terre* (wants to find a reason to destroy Tristram or get him out of his country) (*Tristan II*, 116), but they are amplified in the *Morte Darthur*. Mark's behavior in the *Morte Darthur* has been studied by Kennedy, who writes that "Mark's acts of treason have broken the social ties which bound his nephew and his wife to be loyal to him" (Kennedy, 69). In *Knighthood in the 'Morte Darthur*' she again mentions Mark's treacherous nature as a reason to explain why Tristram and Isolde are not loyal to him: "Tristram […] is not able to marry Isode, but later he is able to justify an adulterous relationship with her […] because his liege lord and her husband, King Mark, is a traitor" (Kennedy, 416). In "Love, Freedom, and Marital Fidelity in Malory's *Morte Darthur*", Kennedy adds says that "Mark suffered ridicule" and lost "royal power because of the adultery of Isode and Tristram" (Kennedy, 189). Critics agree that Mark behaves as a tyrant, and we will see in this chapter how exactly is Mark corrupted and acts as a treacherous king: by expressing his desire to kill Tristram, plotting for Tristram's downfall, and using Tristram's adulterous relationship with Isolde. While I follow what the previous critics have said, I however disagree with Kennedy's last comment when she blames Tristram and Isolde for the loss of Mark's power. The origin of Mark's hatred of Tristram lies in adultery, not with Isolde, but when both Mark and Tristram fall in love with the same married woman named Lady Segwarides, and I believe that Mark has caused his own loss of power because his cunning behavior is shown before Tristram and Isolde drink the love potion, and because he is the reason why Tristram and Isolde are reunited in Ireland.

Indeed, Mark's desire to get rid of Tristram begins when they both fall in love with Lady Segwarides even though she is already married to Sir Segwarides. We thus find here linked the

two themes of adultery and conflict between Tristram and Mark, which foreshadows their upcoming feud over Isolde. Between Tristram and Mark, Lady Segwarides prefers Tristram and she invites the knight in her room, which makes Mark "jeluse" (jealous) (*Works*, 244). Mark's jealousy leads him to anonymously attack Tristram and "hurt sir Trystrames on the breste right sore" (hurt Sir Tristram on the breast right sore) (*Works*, 245). Tristram, who does not know who has attacked him, retaliates and wounds Mark "so sore that he rushed hym to the erthe and brused hym" (so sore that he rushed him to the earth and bruised him) (*Works*, 245). When Tristram later learns that Mark is unwell, Mark does not reveal the truth to his nephew because it would reveal his failed attempt to kill him. Instead, Mark:

> com ascawnce to sir Trystrames to comforte hym as he lay syke in his bedde. But as longe as kynge Marke lyved he loved never aftir sir Trystramys. So aftir that, thoughe there were fayre speche, love was there none. (*Works*, 246)
>
> (came hypocritically to Sir Tristram to comfort him as he lay sick in his bed. But as long as King Mark lived, he loved never after Sir Tristram. So, after that, though there was fair speech, love was there none.) (*Winchester*, 188)

This feud between Mark and Tristram over Lady Segwarides' love acts as the starting point of Mark's hatred towards Tristram. Adultery is connected to Mark and Tristram early on the "Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones", a connection that persists throughout the book. What changes is the woman there are fighting over: Isolde replaces Lady Segwarides when Mark's jealousy and anger towards Tristram makes him use Isolde as a weapon against Tristram. Knowing that Tristram has killed the queen of Ireland's brother and is more likely to be killed by vengeful Irish knights, Mark asks Tristram to go back to Ireland to get Isolde:

> Kynge Mark caste all the ways that he might to dystroy sir Trystrames, and than imagened to hymselff to sende sir Trystramys into Irelande for La Beale Isode. (*Works*, 251)
>
> (King Mark cast all the ways that he might to destroy Sir Tristram; and then imagined in himself to send Sir Tristram into Ireland for La Belle Isode.) (*Winchester*, 189)

The official motive for Tristram's journey is Mark's desire to have Isolde as a wife, but the hidden original and true reason is Mark's hope that Tristram will be killed. Tristram is however successful in his mission and brings Isolde to Mark. Mark is disappointed and does not know that Tristram and Isolde have become magically linked by the love potion. Mark might suffer "ridicule" (Kennedy, 189) because of Tristram, but unlike Kennedy, it is his own fault: Mark is wounded by Tristram because Mark was anonymously trying to hurt Tristram, and his plan of sending Tristram to be killed in Ireland does not work because Tristram manages to have the Irish accept the union between Mark and Isolde. At several occasions, Mark has underestimated Tristram. Also, without Mark, we can assume that Tristram would have gone back to Ireland, or at least not under the same conditions, and Tristram and Isolde would not have drunk the love potion. Thus, Mark cannot blame the lovers when he had evil thoughts the whole time. Now, we will see that Mark's hatred for Tristram, which existed before the start of the adulterous relationship between Tristram and Isolde, gets even worse once Tristram is back and the lovers engage in adultery.

Mark, thanks to Andret's capture of Tristram is Isolde's room, is certain that Tristram and Isolde have an illicit relationship. In order to reveal Tristram and Isolde's relationship to everyone at the court, Mark decides to use several tricks: he finally has found what could be used against Tristram to get rid of him, and he uses their adulterous relationship to his own advantage. At one point, Mark makes Isolde and one hundred ladies drink from a gold horn. The gold horn is said to be magical and to reveal the faithfulness of a lady to her husband: if

the lady manages to drink, she is faithful but spilling the drink means that the lady is untrue. Isolde spills and Mark "swore a grete othe that she sholde be brente" (and swore a great oath that she should be burned alive) (*Works*, 270) but she is saved by the barons who believe that the horn is false. Isolde does not die, but the horn incident shows how little is needed to make Mark condemn his wife. Later, Mark intercepts letters sent between Launcelot, Guinevere and Arthur to Tristram and Isolde. Tristram, who in the meantime has been made member of the Round Table by Arthur, is warned by Launcelot about Mark because they are aware of his treacherous methods. Because of Launcelot and Arthur's bad judgment of Mark, the Cornish king believes that Tristram is plotting against him, although he is the one who is always plotting against Tristram:

> For kynge Arthure and sir Launcelot in a maner thretned kynge Marke in [t]his letters, and as kynge Marke red this lettyrs he demede treson by sir Trystram. (*Works*, 380)
>
> (For King Arthur and Sir Lancelot in a manner threatened King Arthur in his letters, and as King Mark read these letters he deemed treason by Sir Tristram.) (*Winchester*, 244)

To get his revenge and weaken Tristram and his allies, Mark writes to Guinevere about her relationship with Launcelot and tells her that he is aware of the rising suspicions of adultery, and he writes to Arthur to say that Tristram is now publicly his "mortall enemy" (mortal enemy) (*Works*, 381). Mark's interception of the letters and blackmailing Guinevere as well as threatening to reveal her affair illustrates that Mark's wish to destroy Tristram goes beyond his own realm and shows he uses adultery – not only Tristram and Isolde's but also Launcelot and Guinevere's – as a weapon against the lovers.

Mark is presented as a character who cares about the sexual side of adultery, compared to Arthur who favoured the public good and did not say anything about Launcelot and Guinevere's relationship (even when he has growing doubts that his wife and his queen were

lovers). Mark does not keep that information for himself and interferes in the relationships that belong in another kingdom. I suggest that the difference between Arthur and Mark on how they deal with adultery in their respective kingdoms highlights their concern – or lack of concern – for the realm. For Arthur, politics and his love for his knights are more important than the romantical issue of his wife loving Launcelot. Arthur is concerned about what is good for Camelot, and he becomes mad when the adulterous relationship results in his knights being killed. Arthur is also conflicted because he loves Launcelot and starts a war against him only when he sees no other alternative for the survival of his kingdom. For Mark however, romantic jealousy prevails over everything else and he does not think about his knights or about the well-being of his kingdom. Adultery is perceived differently in Camelot and in Cornwall because in Cornwall revealing adultery represents the occasion for Mark to justify his revenge against Tristram while in Camelot Arthur would not gain anything in revealing adultery. Instead, it would only bring division and chaos, what happens when adultery is revealed by Meliagaunt and Agravaine.

Another opposition between Arthur and Mark is the bond they have with Launcelot and Tristram. Arthur and Launcelot are close to each other, Launcelot being one of Arthur's close advisors. Mark has no such affinity for Tristram, and the king declares his hatred of Tristram to two of his knights named Bersules and Amant. Submerged by his anger, Mark orders them to kill Tristram:

> "I woll that ye wete my commynge hydir is to this entente, for to destroy sir Trystram by som wylys other by treson, and hit shall be harde and ever he ascape oure hondis." (*Works*, 353)
>
> ("I want that you know my coming hither is for this intention, to destroy Sir Tristram by some wiles or by treason; and it shall be hard if ever he escapes our hands.") (*Winchester*, 233)

The words “wylys” (wiles) and “treson” (treason) show once again that Mark is ready to do anything to have Tristram killed. The method does not matter, trickery is accepted as long as it results in Tristram’s death. However, one of the two knights, Sir Bersules, refuses to unfairly kill Tristram, considered as the best knight of the kingdom:

> “Sir Trystram is the knyght of worship moste that we knowe lyvynge. And therefore I warne you plainly, I woll not consente to the deth of hym, and therefore I woll yelde hym my servyse and forsake you.” (*Works*, 353-354)
>
> (“Sir Tristram is the knight of most worship that we know living, and therefore I warn you plainly I will not consent to the death of him – and therefore I will yield him my service, and forsake you.”) (*Winchester* 233-234)

Without any remorse, Mark kills Bersules, he “smote sir Bersules on the hede, that the swerde wente to his teithe” (smote Sir Bersules on the head, that the sword went to his teeth) (*Works*, 354). Amant, the other knight who also refuses to kill Tristram, is only spared because two squires manage to hold Mark before he can hurt him. I argue that in this passage, Malory puts political concern back over adultery, and adultery ceases to be the main focus for Mark and for Cornwall. So far, Mark’s actions could still be explained by his jealousy for Tristram, who has been chosen by Lady Segwarides over Mark, and whom Mark’s own wife Isolde loves more than her husband. But adultery cannot be blamed for Mark’s vengeful behaviour when he kills his own knights. The adulterous matter in the *Morte Darthur*, Mark’s jealousy because of Lady Segwarides first and then because of Isolde, serves to expand the political scheme, the political self-destruction of Cornwall by its king.

So far, we have seen that adultery plays a pivotal role in the political intrigue taking place in Cornwall because it is Tristram’s adulterous relationship with Lady Segwarides which starts Mark’s desire to kill his nephew, a desire that increases when Mark realizes that Tristram

and Isolde are in love. While Mark's actions could be defended if Tristram and Isolde intended to hurt him, it is not the case: Mark's purpose in sending Tristram to Ireland was malevolent, Tristram and Isolde's love is only powerful and long-lasting because of the love potion; and unlike the prose *Tristan*, Tristram and Isolde do not trick Mark into believing that Isolde is still a virgin in *Morte Darthur*. I see one major consequence in Mark having no justifiable reason to kill his own knights in order to fulfill his desire to see Tristram dead: Mark's repetitive attempts to destroy his nephew are perceived as more harmful and destructive for the kingdom than adultery. The adultery between Tristram and Isolde does not physically harm anyone: it might have disrupted the power balance of the kingdom in making the queen loving Tristram more than the king, and in having Mark's knights more loyal towards Tristram; but it does not justify Mark killing his own men.

What is more concerning than adultery is the excessive power exerted by the king in order. This excessive power is useful for Malory's agenda in order to present the masculine rivalries as more devastating than adultery. After a tournament takes place in Cornwall, Tristram is left wounded and needs to be healed. Mark seizes the opportunity and tells him "I shall[e be] your leche myself" ("I shall be your leech myself") (*Works*, 412). Tristram is too weak to fight back and Mark takes advantage of Tristram's weakness: instead of healing him, he decides to "put him in a stronge preson" (put him in a strong prison) (*Works*, 412). Tristram is then saved by one of Mark's knights named Sir Sadok. Like Bersules, Sadok refused to obey Mark's order to kill Tristram but managed to escape and kill four of Mark's nephews[20] in the process. We see here that more and more Cornish knights are getting killed in the conflict between Mark and Tristram due to Mark's jealousy. Mark finally gets to kill Tristram "with a trenchaunte glayve" (with a trenchant glaive) (*Works*, 666) while Tristram is sitting harping to Isolde. Mark attacks Tristram when he least expects it. Tristram's unfair death is the result of

[20] Not Tristram nor Andret, but other nephews whose names are not revealed.

his uncle's jealousy, envy and fear towards him because Tristram is the strongest Cornish man, superior to Mark, and more loved by Lady Segwarides and Isolde than the king. In his unstoppable quest, Mark has divided his own family and has weakened his kingdom: some of his nephews like Andret are still supporting Mark and participates in his trickeries while his wife supports Tristram, and knights have been killed on both sides. Adultery is significant in the "Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones" because is it what triggers the violent family feud that has disastrous political consequences for Cornwall. But as we shall see now, adultery only explains the start to Mark's murderous madness which goes much further than killing Tristram.

Tristram is not the only one of Mark's relatives to die by the king's hands. In addition to killing his nephew, Mark also kills his brother and his brother's son once again out of jealousy, and this time adultery cannot be blamed for the murders. Prince Boudwin, Mark's younger brother, manages to defeat Saracens who have attacked Cornwall. Everyone in the kingdom is glad that the enemy has been defeated and celebrate their prince's success at the exception of Mark, who is jealous of his brother and mad that Boudwin is loved by all of Cornwall and loves Tristram:

> Whan kynge Marke wyste this he was wondirly wrote that his brother sholde wynne suche worship and honour. And because this prynce was bettir beloved than he in all that contrey, and also this prynce Bodwyne lovid well sir Trystram, and therefore he thought to sle hym. (*Works*, 388)
>
> (When king Mark found out about this, he was very angry that his brother should win such worship and honor. And because the prince was better loved than him in all the

country, and also because prince Boudwin loved well sir Tristram, he therefore thought to slay him.)[21]

Envious of his brother's prowess and bravery, and scared that his brother's exploit would bring dishonour on himself (because Mark does not have the necessary strength to be in charge of pushing back the enemy), Mark re-establishes the balance of power by striking him "to the herte with a dagger, that he never aftir spake worde" (to the heart with a dagger, that he never spoke a word after that) (*Works*, 389). In killing his brother, Mark takes the power back and is once again the most powerful man in the kingdom: the popular Boudwin, who was a potential threat for Mark and his apparent heir – since Mark does not have any children – is no more. Boudwin, like Tristram, does not appear as a family member but as powerful rival. Mark is finally killed by Alexander's son Sir Bellanger who avenges his father, grandfather and Tristram's deaths:

> And thys sir Bellynger revenged the deth of hys fadir, sir Alysaundir, and sir Trystram, for he slewe kynge Marke. (*Works*, 666)
>
> (And this Sir Bellenger revenged the death of his father Sir Alexander, and Sir Tristram, for he slew King Mark.) (*Winchester*, 463)

In Cornwall, everyone seems to die because of their vengeful king: knights and members of the royal family. King Mark, who is supposed to represent the image of the kingdom, is immoral, unjust and disloyal. Adultery can explain his feud with Tristram, but when we look at the larger picture, we learn that adultery is just one tool used to get his revenge on Tristram. Then, adultery is put aside when Mark kills his brother and another of his nephews. What truly matters for Mark is to gain and maintain power, to be the most powerful man of the kingdom. But Mark is threatened by his brother's strength and popularity, and by Tristram and Isolde's adulterous

[21] This event is not present in the Modern English *Winchester Manuscript*, which does not translate the entirety of the original text. This is my own translation of the quote.

relationship. Adultery is one element, one part of the larger masculine conflicts and quest for power which makes Mark kill his heirs and bring chaos to Cornwall.

Similar to the situation in Camelot, adultery has animated personal rivalries in Cornwall, rivalries which have led to violence, disorder, destruction and death. Andret, like Agravaine in Camelot, purposefully reveals the illicit relationship between the queen and the best knight of the kingdom. Andret's political motive is clear: he wants to get rid of his cousin to take his lands and be more powerful, and he uses the only weakness he can find in Tristram which is his adulterous relationship with Isolde. Tristram and Isolde's relationship is thus used by Andret and by Mark and serves their evil plans of getting rid of Tristram. At the end of the *Morte Darthur*, the kingdom has lost its best knight, its king, its queen, its prince and the prince's son. The difference with Camelot is that Mark is the main perpetrator and antagonist in the realm. Jealous of his brother and his nephew because they are more loved and better warriors than he is, Mark fights a meaningless war to keep his power by eliminating every potential threat. His violent war is meaningless because in addition of driving family members apart, once Mark finally manages to kill Tristram, he is killed shortly after by his grandnephew. In Cornwall, adultery is the initial reason for the feud between Tristram and Mark, and out of several reasons for Mark's jealousy towards the other powerful men of his family.

The second section has shed light on the relationships between knights and also between knight and king in the kingdoms of Camelot and Cornwall. I have studied Malory's changes in the narrative compared to his sources and concluded that he has reduced the importance of adultery in order to give more importance to the conflicts between men, hence why Malory for example follows more his English source for the story of Launcelot and Guinevere. In Camelot and Cornwall, among all the knights, one knight is considered to be better and more powerful than the others: Launcelot in Camelot, and Tristram in Cornwall. Everything seems to go relatively fine until the knights' relationships with their queens is discovered. Adultery plays a central role in the political intrigue because when the Launcelot-Guinevere and Tristram-Isolde relationships are discovered, the political balance of the kingdoms is lost and the political Arthurian world becomes filled with violence. So, in the *Morte Darthur*, adultery is presented as a tool used to get revenge or fulfil other goals, to reveal rivalries between men that are much more devastating than adultery. In comparison to its French sources, the adulterous content finds itself reduced to develop the political agenda and the homosocial rivalries.

In the *Morte Darthur*, it appears that the most important relationships are not the adulterous ones but the homosocial rivalries. The story usually starts with the love of the knights for their ladies, Isolde for Tristram and Guinevere for Launcelot, but it soon animates networks between knights which ends in violent warfare, battles, and deaths. In both kingdoms, the adulterous relationships are used by Agravaine, Mordred and Andret to bring shame of the lovers. In opposition to the loyalties between the two heterosexual couples, natural or magical, the masculine loyalties are much more uncertain. Knights are always plotting against each other, and the tensions between the knights of the Round Table are never-ending. The maliciousness of the knights and of the kings is mostly due to their desire to gain or preserve political power, and Launcelot and Tristram – who are powerful members in their respective kingdoms – become political threats with other men being envious, jealous or afraid of them.

Some knights plot to destroy Launcelot and Tristram, and Arthur and Mark, as they engage in useless conflicts against their best knights, are both blinded by their personal quests for revenge. By bringing division among their knights, the kings destroy their own kingdoms. Arthur and Mark end up being killed by vengeful relatives – a son for Arthur and a grandnephew for Mark – and pay for their disloyalty and their inability to bring peace in their respective kingdoms.

When looking at all the differences between the *Morte Darthur* and its sources, one needs to wonder why Malory has made these changes, why adultery is no longer the principal issue in the realms, why adultery seems less dangerous than homosocial bonds and why Malory appears to be more concerned by political chaos than adultery. In what will be further discussed in the conclusion, I believe that the *Morte Darthur* illustrates the failure of the kingdoms in social and political terms, a loss of unity akin to the situation of the kingdom in fifteenth-century England. To understand Malory's changes, one must look at the historical context. As I have mentioned in the introduction, the *Morte Darthur* was written in 1469 in the midst of the civil war, many connections can be found between the reality of what was happening in England at the time and what is happening in the fictitious kingdom of Camelot. With the *Morte Darthur*, Malory shows how kingdoms are destroyed not by external forces, not by enemies from other lands but from within, as the fellowship in Camelot and the Cornish land are filled with political rivalries, similar to the situation with the nobles during the civil war. This goes with my argument that in the *Morte Darthur*, Malory emphasizes the importance of fellowship and diminishes the adulterous content compared to his French sources: because of the civil war, Malory might have called for more loyalty, fidelity and solidarity among people at a time when English lords and nobles were not unified and betrayed each other, hence the desire to make Launcelot-Guinevere and Tristram-Isolde loyal to each other. In opposition, the *Morte Darthur* serves to illustrate the dire consequences the lack of loyalty and betrayals between men can have on a kingdom. So, the *Morte Darthur* expresses Malory's concerns about society, about

government and about social stability (and instability) in a period of war. The common fate of the kingdoms of Camelot and Cornwall represents the potential political future chaos that England will face if English nobles, if Englishmen are not united but are power-hungry and being driven by jealousy and hate for each other.

Conclusion

Le Morte Darthur, a political statement of its times

In this thesis, I have explored the two main adulterous relationships of the *Morte Darthur*, the Launcelot-Guinevere relationship and the Tristram-Isolde relationship. I have shown that both of them are used by knights and by kings in the kingdoms of Camelot and Cornwall to fulfil their political agenda, to pursue revenge and to bring distrust and disunity. While the situation in the two kingdoms at the end is similar because they are both destructed from within, I have also examined the differences between Camelot and Cornwall when it comes to the portrayal of the adulterous lovers, of the kings and also of the powerful Round Table order, a central organization in Camelot but not in Cornwall.

In the first section I have analyzed the Launcelot-Guinevere and Tristram-Isolde relationships. In both couples, the two lovers are loyal to each other, but their loyalty is presented differently in the *Morte Darthur*. The sexual content of the adulterous relationship between Launcelot and Guinevere that was central in the French prose *Lancelot* and *Mort Artu* is removed in the *Morte Darthur*, and so is the praised courtly love content of the *Chevalier de la Charrette* story. Also, Guinevere does become nun by choice and not out of fear like in the *Mort Artu*. Ultimately, both lovers put God above each other and follow's Malory vision of virtuous love where loyalty first lies in God and then in your lover. So, I maintain that Malory has made all these changes and removed all explicit sexual acts to stripe Launcelot and Guinevere's love of its courtly and passionate nature in order to make it platonic and virtuous and make an example out of them. This is why the lovers only have positive traits and not evil traits that could upset the readers' opinion about them: Launcelot and Guinevere's depiction needs to be as close as perfection as possible in order to have the homosocial distrust and

disunity come out as a strong contrast, which then allows the *Morte Darthur* to better denounce and criticize that masculine disloyalty.

For Tristram and La Belle Isolde, things are different. Unlike Launcelot, Tristram marries another woman than Isolde, a woman named Isolde les Blanches Mains. I have claimed that what binds the lovers together in the *Morte Darthur* and prevent Tristram from having sex with Isolde les Blanches Mains is a powerful love potion that Tristram and La Belle Isolde drink by mistake. Even though Tristram and La Belle Isolde love each other before the potion, they need magic for their relationship to last forever, in opposition to Launcelot and Guinevere who do not require any magical help. I have demonstrated that the dissimilar endings between the two adulterous pairs in the *Morte Darthur* makes us realize that loyalty is important, but that loyalty also needs to be natural and not artificial because the genuine lovers (by genuine I mean without supernatural interference) are allowed redemption whereas the magical lovers' lives end tragically when Tristram is killed by his uncle and Isolde dies of sorrow. There is thus a hierarchy within loyalty, and Launcelot and Guinevere are the preferred model to follow when it comes to being loyal.

In the second section I have examined how the text positions adulterous relationships as what men – knights and kings – use to fuel the personal conflicts between knights and king within the two kingdoms. I have also examined how adultery influences the bigger quest for power, a quest ending in disorder, violence, and chaos. I have studied scenes taking place in Camelot where knights profit from Launcelot and Guinevere's adulterous relationship and where the knights' disloyal behavior is accentuated. *Le Morte Darthur* shifts its focus from the adulterous relationship to the fellowship and the betrayal between the knights of the Round Table, betrayals which bring destruction of the kingdom. Adultery is not at center of the plot but is here to serve the political theme. For example, in Cornwall, adultery constitutes the basis of Mark's jealousy, and Tristram's adultery with La Belle Isolde definitely strengthens Mark's

hatred towards Tristram. Adultery motivates Mark in his revenge against Tristram, but adultery has nothing to do with Boudwin and Alexander, Mark's brother and nephew whom Mark kills out of jealousy and in order to keep his power. In the bigger themes of masculine rivalries and quest for political power, adultery can only partly explain Mark's behavior.

Throughout the thesis I also have been looking at the French and English sources and seen how Malory has followed them, has taken inspiration from them but has altered them and added his own material as well. While adultery was central to the French texts, I have shown that the men-women relationships/love are less important than the men-men relationships/love in the *Morte Darthur* than in its sources, and that more importance is given to the masculine rivalries leading to political disintegration. The narrative is male-centered with many male-male relationships notably due to the companionship of the Round Table. The fellowship is presented as a homosocial environment, and the *Morte Darthur* gives more space to the tensions and disloyalties between men than to the love and loyalty between the heterosexual lovers. In comparison to its sources, politics have taken over romance in the *Morte Darthur*: one of the best examples for this thesis is Arthur's wish to fight Launcelot when he learns that Launcelot has killed twelve of his knights and not because Launcelot is Guinevere's adulterous lover. This means that adultery does not hinder the kingdom as long as it is kept secret between the lovers. This is a consequential narrative choice by Malory as the text only condemns Launcelot and Guinevere's adulterous relationship through Arthur's decision when their adulterous love turns into a political scandal (whereas the text did not condemn the adulterous love between the lovers), a love which in itself does not create larger tensions in the realm.

To summarize, in Malory's work, adultery is a significant part of the destruction of the kingdoms of Camelot and Cornwall. Adultery constitutes a flaw in the power balance of the kingdom because in both kingdoms the queen is closer to her knight than to her cuckolded husband. Although adultery might disrupt the supposed forces of power with the king being

politically threatened by his best knight, one should notice that adultery it is not condemned in the *Morte Darthur* until adultery is used for the knights' political agendas, and that the lovers themselves never express hate against their kings and never wish to cause them any harm. For example, the scenes present in the French sources where Tristram and Isolde trick Mark and have Isolde's virgin maid secretly take Isolde's place in the king's bed because Isolde is no longer a virgin, or the scene where Launcelot provokes the knights by telling them they are cowards, are not found in the *Morte Darthur*. Instead, the *Morte Darthur* depicts the lovers as pacifists, as characters who do not have evil thoughts and do not start the fights. When the lovers take part into the conflicts, it is because they are the targets of accusations and they must defend themselves and save each other (against Agravaine and Andret's accusations and against the kings trying to kill them for example). Launcelot and Tristram only fight their fellow knights when their lives are at risks. It happens seldom in the *Morte Darthur* but many people get killed when they do fight, which results in more and more disruption in the political structures. Because they have played a role in the destruction of the Round Table, Launcelot and Guinevere decide to repent themselves as they enter the religious life and are then granted redemption.

In the conclusion of the second section, I have mentioned that Malory's motivation to alter the French sources, to downplay Guinevere and Launcelot's physical adultery, to make their relationship based on loyalty and on mutual trust, to transform adultery from a romantic issue into a political threat and to put the focus on the factional rivalries within the Round Table illustrates the failure of the kingdoms in social and political terms, a situation which is similar to the one of the English kingdom during the fifteenth-century. I want to further explain this similarity, and I argue that the *Morte Darthur* has a historical relevance: Malory's authorial decisions show his concern about the social instability of the English kingdom. The kingdoms of Camelot and Cornwall might be fictitious and the characters might sometimes resort to magic

but the *Morte Darthur* reveals a lot about the real-life contemporary events with the fights between the knights and the kings reflecting the tensions among the English nobles.

As I have stated in the introduction, *Le Morte Darthur* was written in 1469 in the midst of a civil war which lasted from 1455 to 1487. England had lost the Hundred Years War to France in 1453, a loss which was followed by social and political troubles. King Henry VI – known to be simple-minded – hated the powerful nobles, and those nobles therefore started to question the king and his ability to control the country. The politically instable situation between nobles and king eventually led to the fight for the throne of England – nowadays known as "War of the Roses" – between Lancastrians who still supported Henry VI, and Yorkists who wanted to see the duke of York become king. The civil war was a disaster for the nobility, which saw half of its lords die during the war. The war ended in 1485 with the Battle of Bosworth, which was won by the Lancastrians and saw Henry Tudor – who had blood ties to the House of Lancaster – be crowned king. I believe that *Le Morte Darthur*, by illustrating how Camelot and Cornwall are destroyed from within and not by external forces (as the kingdoms are filled with political rivalries), presents a fictitious situation in literature similar to the real one in history with the rivalries between English nobles during the civil war. Both real (England) and fictitious (Camelot and Cornwall) kingdoms suffer a severe political loss, and I believe that the real-life events have an impact on the presentation and the treatment of adultery in the *Morte Darthur*. In a period of political insecurity, I interpret the differences between the *Morte Darthur* and its sources – removal of sexual adultery and addition of episodes showing disunity – as expressing Malory's desire to comment on English society and show to the audience what issues England were facing through the examples of Camelot and Cornwall.

Work in relation to the audience of the *Morte Darthur* has been done by several scholars, who have explained why Malory removed traces of sexual adultery (Moorman, 1960), (Kennedy, 1988-1991), (Fries, 1991), (Kennedy, 1997), (Sturges, 1997) and why he has

expanded the political plot (Grimm, 2001), (Robeson, 2003), (Kelly, 2004), (Hodges, 2005). However, the present scholarship mainly investigates the types of audience constituting the readers of the *Morte Darthur* and it does not talk about the *Morte Darthur* showing the possible future failure of England to its audience and it does not incorporate adultery into it. In "The evolution and legacy of French prose romance" for example, Norris J. Lacy explains that "new and expanded audiences, perhaps impatient with meandering romances that multiplied characters and intrigues and abandoned storylines or suspended them for hundreds of pages, came to prefer more direct, more realistic, and generally more succinct narratives (Lacy, 180) because of "the expansion of literacy into populations other than the refined leisure classes of the French and other courts" (Lacy, 180). Indeed, the *Morte Darthur* was completed two centuries after its French sources, French texts that were a literature of leisure destined to an aristocratic audience made of ladies and troubadours[22], and not to a broader audience like the *Morte Darthur* who could read Malory's work because the level of literacy had gone up.

I see Malory's changes as a consequence of the English historical context, changes made to feel more connected to the English audience and to build parallels with English history, and I thus connect literature and history to prove that the *Morte Darthur* focuses on the fellowship and on the tensions between factions of the Round Table because England was facing political troubles and was divided by affinities as well (with the Lancastrians who supported King Henry VI and the Yorkists who wanted to change the king). At the time Malory was making authorial choices for the content of the *Morte Darthur*, political instability was a more urgent topic than adultery, and in order to make the *Morte Darthur* closer to the reality it was commenting on, adultery had to be downplayed in order for the audience to clearly see the parallels between fiction and reality. A narrative focusing on sexualized adultery would have obstructed these

[22] Troubadour: "class of lyric poets and poet-musicians often of knightly rank who flourished from the 11th to the end of the 13th century chiefly in the south of France and the north of Italy and whose major theme was courtly love" (Merriam-Webster)

parallels from working, hence why the main purpose of adulterous relationships is to emphasize the greater political disunity and disintegration.

In "Sir Thomas Malory-Historian?" Nellie Slayton Aurner argues that in the *Morte Darthur*, Arthur resembles the historical English monarchs and that Arthur's portrayal in the last third of the *Morte Darthur* is close to Henry VI, who was king at the beginning of the civil war. Aurner points out that "the personality and career of Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI correspond respectively to (1) the Arthur of the first three books[23], (2) the Arthur of book four extending through to the Grail section, and (3) the Arthur of the post-Grail period" (Aurner, 367). First, "Henry IV created forty-six new knights and established the Order of the Bath, another revival of the Round Table organization" and had "loyalty of all classes. Parliament, nobles, commons…" (Aurner, 369). This portrayal of a generous, merciful, and humble King devoted to God as Henry IV is reflected at the beginning of the *Morte Darthur*. She continues by recalling that Henry V was a "lover of chivalry" (Aurner, 370) who had "imperial powers" (Aurner, 371). This corresponds to the time when Arthur is a powerful king. Finally, the end of Arthur's reign mirrors Henry VI who is said to have "no power to assert his authority over the will of others", what is considered to be his biggest "weakness as a ruler" (Aurner, 377). Using Aurner's mirroring of the fictitious king Arthur and the English monarchs of the House of Lancaster, I will now show that Malory makes a parallel between the adulterous situations in *Le Morte Darthur* and real-life history.

First, if we add Launcelot and Guinevere's adulterous relationship, the "loyalty of all classes" Henry IV had would correspond to the creation of the Round Table by Arthur, when dividing affinities, factions, and the adultery between Launcelot and Guinevere were still non-

[23] There are eight books in the *Morte Darthur*, corresponding to the eight main stories. They are titled as follow: "From the marriage of King Uther unto King Arthur", "The Noble Tale between King Arthur and Lucius the Emperor of Rome", "A Noble Tale of Sir Lancelot du Lake", "The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney", "The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyonesse", "The Noble Tale of the Sangrail", "The Tale of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere" and "The Death of Arthur". In this thesis, I have focused on the 5th, 7th and 8th books.

existent. Henry V's "imperial powers" in England would correspond in the *Morte Darthur* to the rise of the Round Table in Camelot, with the knights gaining fame and success. Launcelot becomes the best knight of the Round Table, the most respected one. He grows closer to Guinevere but it does not harm Arthur yet because Launcelot and Guinevere's adultery remains unknown to the public eye. When Henry VI's "weakness as a ruler" is exposed in England, it coincides with the Arthurian knights quarrelling among each other, knights who desire to eliminate political opponents part of rival factions and who take advantage of Launcelot and Guinevere's adultery (with Agravaine and Meliagaunt's accusations against Launcelot and Guinevere resulting in Arthur's obligation to assert his power over the lovers and take decisions against his will, which leads into a war against Launcelot and in the destruction of the Round Table). In Malory's text, Tristram and Isolde's whole relationship marks the beginning of adultery used for greater political purposes when the adulterous relationship is discovered by Andret and by Mark. Mark has imperial powers when he kills his own knights and blood relatives, and yet is unable to control the adulterous relationship between Tristram and Isolde: he is both powerful and weak, traits from real-life kings Henry V and Henry VI.

With the historical context being put in parallel, the Launcelot-Guinevere and Tristram-Isolde adulteries thus stand for something more. In the *Morte Darthur*, adultery – because exploited and politicized by several members of the kingdom – is the opportunity seized by men to jeopardize the power dynamics of that said kingdom, to fulfill personal treacherous plans and to be disloyal by changing sides, switching allegiance and betray members of the kingdom. Adultery in the *Morte Darthur* is not presented as the sexual relationship between a queen and her knight but as a strong loyal bond uniting two people, as the symbol of unity and loyalty that is destroyed by envious men. Through the lens of adultery, Malory uses literature to denounce how the strong and loyal bonds that unified England under Henry IV and Henry V (similar to the strong and long-lasting bonds of the adulterous couples in *Le Morte Darthur*) are

now being replaced by fragile and unreliable ones disuniting the country under Henry VI because of the civil war. For example, Mordred betraying his father Arthur and killing him, or Andret going against his cousin Tristram in the *Morte Darthur* echoes the political disorder brought in England by two of the most powerful Yorkists named Richard Neville (the Earl of Warwick and the most powerful noble of England at the time) and George Plantagenet (Duke of Clarence and brother to the Yorkist king Edward IV) who betrayed their allies and changed side to support their opponents the Lancastrians. Changing loyalties could also explain why the *Morte Darthur* differentiates Launcelot and Guinevere's loyalty from Tristram and Isolde's. In this thesis, I have argued that Tristram and Isolde are not presented as virtuous lovers in *Le Morte Darthur*, and that they do not get redemption because they need help from a love potion in order to have their loyalty and love grow stronger and become never-ending. Still, their love is perceived are more fragile than Lancelot and Guinevere's when, at one point, Tristram almost forgets about Isolde and weds another woman. As such, there appears to be a hierarchy among the lovers depending on the nature of loyalty (constant or changing), which would confirm why Launcelot and Guinevere are the preferred model of loyalty to follow: because theirs is never called into question contrary to Tristram and Isolde's.

As my reading of the *Morte Darthur* has shown, Malory's treatment of adultery differs greatly in comparison to how it is treated by the authors of the *Morte Darthur*'s French sources. *Le Morte Darthur* truly captures the complexity of medieval literature with the authorial process of choosing elements from various sources and managing to create a cohesive tale. Adultery is a fascinating topic to study as such because Malory has altered and politicized the romantic stories of Launcelot and Guinevere and of Tristram and Isolde while keeping the basis of adultery – love – and showed how loyal it could be. Malory has modernized the stories and has made the content of *Le Morte Darthur* resemble more the historical truth he was living with betrayals between men who are willing to do anything to gain or keep power. Indeed, the *Morte*

Darthur, seemingly a tale about some fictitious kings and knights from the past[24], actually tells a lot about the historical period it was written in with the real-life multiple political upheavals and the end of the Age of Chivalry symbolized by the destruction of the Round Table, a destruction not blamed on adultery but on the men who used it, revealed it, and only brought chaos to their kingdom.

Times have changed and, as a consequence, the way the stories are narrated changes as well. The reduction of the adulterous theme in the *Morte Darthur* illustrates that sexualized and romanticized adulteries – that were chosen by the French authors during the 12th and 13th centuries to show the impact of adultery on a kingdom to its readers, mostly members of the French nobility – were no longer chosen by Malory as the main concern to educate a broader English population whose fear was more about warfare than about adultery. *Le Morte Darthur*, by rewriting stories that were written several centuries earlier, is then a perfect example of how literature evolves with its times.

[24] Medieval legends and romances put king Arthur's reign during the late 5th and early 6th centuries.

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